

## Sin (Part Two)

### Sin and Folly

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I am going to begin the sermon today by quoting the statement by John C. Ryle by which he defined sin, all the way back in the 19th Century, as he began to see "modernism" and "Laodiceanism" (Those were his words.) creeping into the Church of England.

I say furthermore that a sin, to speak more particularly, consists in doing, saying, thinking, or imagining anything that is not in perfect conformity with the mind and law of God. Sin, in short, as the scripture says, is the transgression of the law. The slightest outward or inward departure from absolute mathematical parallelism with God's revealed will and character constitutes a sin, and at once makes us guilty in God's sight.

To me, this definition makes clear *why* sin is such a formidable enemy to holiness, and *why* it is so amazing that Jesus did not sin in 33½ years. It is especially amazing when considering that it is in our nature to sin, and He was in all things made like we are. Yet, He was an offering for sin—without blemish, either internally or externally. What He did was to show that man need not sin in order to be human.

We also saw that David traced his sinfulness all the way back to his conception. And we were reminded that Mr. Armstrong stated that, though he felt that human nature was essentially neutral at birth, it did have a stronger pull toward the self. A major factor of life's experiences is that very much of our conduct tends to strengthen the pull toward the self, while little is working to keep that nature even more or less neutral.

Thus, by the time God calls us, the Bible shows that we are thoroughly enslaved to this self-centered nature. It is a slavery that is so strong that it can only be broken by the power of God. But it is a slavery with which we have a love/hate relationship. Like the Israelites who rejoiced to leave their

bondage in Egypt; but, once they were out and experiencing the hardships of the pilgrimage to the Promised Land, their heart yearned to go back to their former bondage. Love/Hate.

Now, in fact, so over-powering is sin's deceitful urge that God shows (in reading through Hebrews the 3rd and the 4th chapters) that it overcame their faith—that is, the Israelites' faith. And, on the trail, they left a pile of dead bodies. In fact, it says their carcasses were strewn from one end of the pilgrimage to the other (from Egypt to Canaan) as a witness to human nature's strength.

We also saw that, though "sin is the transgression of the law," the word "law" should be understood as "teaching" or "instruction." Sin is the transgression of the *instruction of God*. That broadens sin's definition out a great deal. In fact, it broadens it out to include *example* — as in the example of Christ's life, and the principles that are shown in His example. And even where there is no specific enacted law stated governing conduct in a given area, if we do not *do* what He did, we are sinning. So, therefore, sin includes the breaking of the spirit, or the intention, of a law, a principle, or an example.

It is right here that the Bible writers' use of terms (such as "miss the mark," or "to turn aside") makes sense. Righteousness indicates *a standard*. When a person sins, he is not necessarily breaking an enacted law—but "missing the mark" set by a standard, *or* "turning aside" from a standard set by an example or included within the spirit of an enacted law.

We also saw that ignorance does not absolve sin. We saw this in Leviticus 4 and Leviticus 5 where the Old Testament sacrificial laws clearly show that, though a person sins in ignorance, he must make a sacrifice for atonement whenever knowledge of the sin is revealed. It shows that he was unclean the whole while, even though he was ignorant. Then Jesus added in Luke 12 that a person's punishment might be lessened because of sinning in ignorance; but they are still *guilty*, and may be worthy of death—since "the wages of sin is death."

Turn with me, in the book of Acts, to a verse that we looked at last week, which to me is kind of the "signature" of Jesus' ministry, where Peter (describing Jesus) says,

**Acts 10:38** How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

Now, unlike the Pharisees—who were shown achieving a measure of righteousness through a combination of ritual and ignoring (and avoiding) sinners—Jesus focused His life on *doing* positive acts of justice and righteousness in peoples' behalf.

It was at this point in the sermon last week that I had you turn to Amos the 5th chapter, where God shows that we are to let justice "roll down" as waters and righteousness "like a mighty river." Now recall that "justice" is the external act; and "righteousness" is the internal standard that is in alignment with God, which guides our conscience and motivates the outward acts. There in Amos the 5th chapter, God is calling for the Israelites to make positive steps to *do good*, proceeding continuously—like the waves of the ocean and a mighty river moving a turbine in order to produce even more power.

Do you get the picture? Connect this all to Jesus. He went around doing good. He followed the advice that was given in Amos 5. His acts were continuously coming forth from Him; positive acts of what the Old Testament called "justice"—external acts of goodness that were being motivated by, aligned with, and guiding Him; that is, the Standard of righteousness.

If *you* do that (if *we* do this), brethren, it is getting very difficult to sin. It is hard to sin when you are doing the right thing. Do you get what I mean? That is God's approach. His approach is a positive one (not negative), even though negative is a part of it—which is, we have to avoid doing sin. But the way to avoid doing sin is to do good. That was the major difference between Jesus and the Pharisees.

In James the 4th chapter is another verse that we used last week, and we are going to spend a little bit more time this week on it than we did last week. Verse 17 is a conclusion to a paragraph that involves the setting of one's will—making plans to do 'this and that'.

**James 4:17** Therefore to him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin.

Basically, what it is saying is that omitting to do good (when it is in our power to do so) is sin. In doing some further study on this, one commentator remarked, on this verse, that that statement can be shortened into a very brief English sentence. It is the equivalent of saying, "You have been warned." It is also like saying, "Now that I have pointed out the matter to you, you have no excuse." Put yourself in James' place, writing this to those people to whom he was writing. It would be the same in English as saying, "Now that I have pointed out the matter to you, you have no excuse but to do this." See? Knowing what we should do obligates us to *do* it. If we do not do it, it is sin.

Now, the *Interpreter's Commentary* had this to say on this verse:

When one becomes a Christian, one voluntarily takes upon himself responsibilities and obligations which ordinary persons do not acknowledge. The ordinary person recognizes responsibilities within the circle of certain limited responsibilities, but what lies beyond that circle is not his concern.

How many times have you heard somebody say (or, have you said yourself), "Well, that's no matter of mine. He should take care of it"? That is kind of what is being talked about here. Now, continuing the quote.

No one can be forced to become a Christian. The duties which [are] in here, in the Christian vocation, can only be assumed willingly. No one needs to be in the dark about what is involved. Certainly, Christ wants no blind-followers. But when anyone, of his own free will, makes the choice of adherence to Christ, he cannot refuse to carry out the obligations of that relationship without sinning against the Lord.

Let us put this into a practical situation. Suppose you were hired by an employer to carry out a certain responsibility for which you were going to be paid at a certain rate (maybe per hour, per day, or per week—whatever it was). What if you did *not* carry out all that you were obligated by your employer to do, since you had chosen to go to work for this person. And you justified yourself by saying, "It's only a little thing. It doesn't matter. Nobody will ever notice." Put that into a Christian's obligation. If we take that same approach toward Christ, we have sinned!

Now, what do you think the employer will do if he finds out that you are not doing all that you were hired to do? He is going to fire you and get somebody else who will fulfill the responsibility. Do you see the principle that is involved here? If we fail to do what Christ has hired us to do, and we took upon ourselves the responsibility of being a Christian and then we ignore our obligations, we have *sinned*.

Let me give you an example of something that happened this week to Richard. He was out doing some shopping. He drove his automobile into his garage at home, stopped the car, turned off the key, locked the car, went into the house and did a few things. Then he went out and got into his automobile, turned on the ignition, and the car would not run. It would start, but he could not keep it running. When I say it would 'start', it would just barely keep running; but every time he stepped on the gas—pffft! It would just cut right out.

Well, he asked my advice and I said, "It sounds like a gasoline problem, a fuel problem." He asked Ronny Graham. Ronny came up with about the same thing, but added something else that it might have been. But we were no closer to the solution than we were before. Finally, Richard had to get the car towed to a garage. In order for them to find out what the problem was, they had to put it on one of these electronic diagnostic machines—which took a great deal of time and a couple of days for them to find out what the problem was. They finally located it. It took them five dollars to fix it.

Do you know what it was? I do not know whether I have this exactly right; but when he made the trip up to the Baltimore and Harrisburg area, his transmission went out on him. He had it repaired up there. Well, when they put the transmission (and everything) back together again, there is a little

piece of computer equipment that has a magnet as a part of it. That magnet has to be within the width of a piece of paper. I think it is three thousandths, or three ten-thousandths of an inch. But that magnet has to be within that three thousandths (or three ten-thousandths) of an inch of the flywheel in order for the magnet to work. I guess if the magnet does not work, then this little computer dealy does not work either. The man who put the transmission back together did not *do* that one little job, and it cost Richard a couple hundred dollars. See? He *neglected to do* what he should have done, and the "sin" cost Richard.

Let me give you another example: This is a very poignant story that I read in *Reader's Digest*, probably about ten or fifteen years ago now. It involved a pilot in the Air Force. He was ferrying a jet airplane from one part of the world to another part of the world, and he needed fuel. He landed, and he had the airplane refueled. Then, he took off. Actually, he never took off—because the airplane could not gain enough altitude, and it crashed. When the investigators looked to find out what went wrong, the first thing you think of is that something went wrong with the engines. But, in their checking out what went wrong, they found out that the pilot had made three or four *very tiny, critical* errors—things that he *failed to do*. He failed to consider the ground temperature. He failed to consider the weight of the fuel that was put into the airplane's tanks. He failed to consider the length of the runway. I think that there was a fourth thing that he failed to consider, but he failed—he did not carry through with what he should have done and the "sin" cost him his life. Any pilot would have been *obligated* to do those things. But *he did not do it* — and he is dead.

That is the kind of thing that we are talking about here. *Failing to do* what we know that we should do is sin, and "the wages of sin is death."

Now turn with me to Proverbs 24, because I want to show you another area that teaches us how easy it is to fall into sin—let us say, the sin of negligence, of not carrying through, or of being ignorant of something. This one kind of has more of a leaning toward ignorance of sin. This is a hair-raising statement.

**Proverbs 24:9** The devising [thought] of foolishness is sin.

Let that sink in. Now, "foolishness" is a term used broadly in the Bible to cover everything from being silly, to violent crimes against men, and sins against God. Being silly is sin—even as murder, lying, and idolatry. (The only difference is that the violence may not be there.)

We are going to chase this out a little bit, because it is very interesting. This verse says that even the *thinking* (my Bible has a marginal reference: "or, the *planning*") of foolishness is sin. This puts this into the same category as the teaching that Jesus gave there in Matthew 5, where *the lust*, you see, *the thinking about* adultery (or about murder) is sin. Well, 'the planning [of]' or 'the thinking about' foolishness is also sin.

Let us carry this out a little bit further. To me it gets more and more interesting. We are going to go to Ecclesiastes the 2nd chapter.

**Ecclesiastes 2:1** I said in my heart, Go to now, I will prove you with mirth [Ah, Ha! Laughing. Having a good time. Pleasure. Partying. So he says], therefore enjoy pleasure: and behold, [he says] this also is vanity.

It is useless. Is *vanity* sin? Yes, it is. So he reached a conclusion in verse 2.

**Ecclesiastes 2:2** I said of laughter—"Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"

If it does not do any good, why do it? Now remember, all of these things are written with the Kingdom of God in mind and they are advice to God's children about how to conduct their life.

**Ecclesiastes 2:3** I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom . . .

In other words, he did not quite let himself get drunk, but he let himself get to "feeling good." See? So the spirit, as it were, was elevated, and he had a bit of a "high" on. So he says:

**Ecclesiastes 2:3** I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, all the while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under the heaven all the days of their life.

We will not read the whole thing there, but he eventually does get down to something here.

**Ecclesiastes 2:12-13** Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness [Remember verses 1 and 2] and folly [foolishness]; for what can the man do who succeeds the king? —only what he has already done. Then I saw [notice this comparison] that wisdom excels folly [foolishness], as far as light [What is light a symbol of in the Bible? Truth.] excels darkness [And darkness is a symbol of wickedness—evil].

There is, in Proverbs 15, an interesting connection made to this.

**Proverbs 15:21** Folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment, but a man of understanding walks uprightly.

Are you aware of the way that the Proverbs are written? Two of the ways that they are written are as "synonymous" (as it is called) and "antithetic." *Synonymous* means that two phrases will be linked together because they compare with one another as being the same. So, usually, the second phrase clarifies the first one—so that there is a great deal more understanding gotten out of it. This verse is *antithetical*. What it means here is that the truth is revealed by showing opposites. What are the opposites here? The opposites are "folly" and "uprightly".

This Hebrew word "uprightly" means "*make his paths straight.*" So, the person of understanding 'makes his paths straight.' That, in turn, shows then that folly is the equivalent of "missing the mark" or "turning aside." *Turning aside* would be better, because it is closer to walking a path. You see? "Missing the mark" involves shooting, as in shooting an arrow; whereas



"turning aside" involves walking *away from* a path. So, the person of wisdom walks a straight path. The person of folly walks off the path. The path is God's Word. "Walking off the path" means that the person has departed from God's word. Folly is sin. Foolishness—being silly—is sin. (We have not seen yet, in a way, *why* it is sin. We will get to that in just a moment.)

Is it not interesting that Jesus is shown, in the Bible, to be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"? Do you know of any place, in the New Testament, where Jesus is shown either smiling or laughing? I do not. This does not mean that He did not smile. This does not mean that He did not enjoy a hearty laugh. What it does, I think, is—by the curious fact that He is never recorded smiling or laughing—it indicates that smiling (or laughing) is not high on God's priority list. In fact, He says in His Word (right in Ecclesiastes) that "sorrow is better than laughter." Do you know why? Because it makes you wiser. That is *why*. Wisdom is the chief thing. Hardly anything is learned by laughing. Almost all good comes out of trial and sorrow and difficulty. So, laughing is not very high on God's scale of importance.

Let us go back to the book of Ephesians.

**Ephesians 5:1-5** Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and has given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting [We are getting close here.], which are not fitting [margin, "proper"], but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

"Foolish talking" and "coarse jesting," Paul says, are not fitting. What makes this even more serious is that those two are linked in the same context as fornication, uncleanness, and idolatry—all of which we surely know as sin.

The relationship, within the context, ought to be clear. Now back to Ecclesiastes. (There are some people who try so hard to be funny.) Solomon is still 'testing things out'.

**Ecclesiastes 7:25** I applied my heart to know, to search and to seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.

Notice that—"Wickedness of folly." *Foolishness is sin*, even if (what we would consider to be) a very low level. Why? Why would it be sin, in 'foolish talking' or 'coarse jesting'? Because much humor is at the expense of another person and is really nothing more than the revelation of one's **pride**—taking advantage of and putting down the foibles and characteristics of another person; somebody else who is also in the image of God. But even over and above that is the fact that *foolishness* (remember what I told you before, the Bible uses "foolishness" in the sense for everything from 'being silly' all the way up to sins that are directly against God Himself) *encompasses every one of them*.

So, *to murder* is foolish; or, *to worship idols* is foolish. *To involve oneself in 'foolish talking' or 'coarse jesting'* is also foolish. It is folly. It is sin. And the reason "why" is because God Himself—who is *the* Standard of righteousness—would never do such a thing. If the Standard would not do such a thing (and counsels us not to get involved in those things), then it is foolish for any person wanting to be *in the image of God* to do such things.

So "foolishness" means it does not make sense for such a person (a son of God) to do such things. "Foolishness" denotes a low moral and ethical standard. And we want to shoot for the best there is.

See how easy it is to sin in ignorance, to fall short, to turn off the path? All of us have fallen under the condemnation of those things that I have just read—including myself, because I have cut people down, seen a weakness, seen a foible, seen a characteristic, and (using my quick, mercurial mind) just cut the props right out from under that person. I sinned.

Now let us look at another area. A little bit different area, but it also tends to show why sin is such a formidable enemy to us.

**Proverbs 3:27** Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so.

Please remember James 4:17. When we become a Christian, it *obligates us* to follow Christ. It *obligates us* to obey the law of God. This problem (verse 27) is a law of God. God says "withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do it".

**Proverbs 3:28-29** Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it." when you have it with you. Do not devise evil against your neighbor, for he dwells by you safety's sake.

We are not always *in the position to render help* to someone in need. But there are times when we are in the position to help, and we may not do so for a variety of reasons. But (just to remind us of the importance of the principle contained here in these verses) remember Matthew 25, in the parable where Jesus explained to these people that they were going into the Kingdom because when He was thirsty, they gave Him a drink. When He was hungry, they gave Him food. In other words, when it was in their power to give help, they did it. They did not do it to Christ directly, but they did it to Him indirectly in that they did it "to the least of these"—Christ's brethren.

Those who were *not* going into the Kingdom of God were those who had it in their power, but did not help. They were sinning. See, there is the reason that they were not going into the Kingdom (in the illustration). I mean, they were practicing *not helping* people who needed help, when they had the power to give it.

Jesus addressed this directly in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In that parable (in Luke the 11th chapter), the priest and the Levite refused to help the man who was injured. The implication within the parable is that it was within their power to help; but they did not give any help. And so, therefore, the Samaritan did.

We should receive our instruction of this by coordinating it with Galatians 6: 10—where Paul says that we are to give help, especially to the brethren, *as*

*we have the opportunity*. That coordinates perfectly with Proverbs 3:27—"as we have the opportunity".

There is a tendency for us to think of this in terms of giving physical help—money, clothing, food, lending your hand to lighten one's load (maybe when somebody is moving, or doing a project around the house). Certainly that is the verse's main thrust. But there is also the possibility that, from time to time, we have the opportunity to give somebody some spiritual help, especially in terms of *giving encouragement* while somebody is going through a trial. Sherly Togans wrote an article that appears in this month's *Forerunner* about communication across the miles—that is, writing letters (keeping in touch). That is a wonderful service that everybody can do, to some extent anyway. It is a *spiritual help*.

Sometimes though, we have the opportunity to give somebody some *correction*—maybe correction that they very badly need. But here we have to be careful, because this person that you are talking to might be somebody who wears his feelings on his sleeve and becomes very easily offended. Or maybe we do not handle it just quite right, and we create offense.

There are a number of reasons why we may not give somebody the help that we can. Usually, doing this requires the giving of time, or maybe some energy, maybe some money, sometimes risking a friendship. We would rather *draw back*, rather than *make the sacrifice*. Well, that is understandable, but should it be overcome? Especially (maybe) when we do not want to threaten a friendship? Well, the answer to that is: it is up to you.

See, I cannot make that decision. I can counsel it. But God shows that *it is our responsibility*. When it is within our power (and, *as we have the opportunity*), to fail to do so is sin. We have fallen short. Is that not easy to do? (I mean commit that sin?) It certainly is. Of that, there is no doubt.

At this point in my sermon, I have reached a place where I want to return to a point that I spoke on last Sabbath. But it is going to take more time than I have today. So, I think that what I will do is stop on this. Then, the next time I speak to you, we will pick this up right at this point; because I want to return to nail down very clearly *where sin comes from*. I think that (when I am done with this next section) you will see that what I am teaching you is

true, and why God had to give us the Holy Spirit in order to stop sin within us.