

Sin (Part 3)

Where Does Sin Come From?

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We are going to begin the sermon today in Romans the 1st chapter and just sort of lay a foundation. This sermon is again going to be on sin, and it is going to be on that aspect of "Where does sin come from?" or "Where is it generated from?"

Romans 1:18-19 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

Then Paul refers to the creation being a witness to all of mankind regardless of whether they have ever been called by God or not, that God exists. So there are certain responsibilities that come upon men, whether they are converted or not, because they ought to be able to tell by the creation that God *is*. In Romans 2 Paul goes on to say that even the unconverted have a conscience, much of which is in alignment with the law of God.

Romans 1:21-22 Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [Hang onto that.]

In verse 23, they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image. In other words they moved into idolatry.

Romans 1:24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their own bodies among themselves.

Now notice again—"gave them up to the uncleanness in the lusts of **their own heart**."

Romans 1:25-27 Who changed the truth of God into the lie [probably a reference to idolatry], and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves that penalty of their error which was due.

Undoubtedly a reference to lesbianism and homosexuality.

Romans 1:28-32 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge [hang onto that as well, because this was what was in the heart.], God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,

undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

What a denunciation of mankind! Now on the other hand, there is no doubt that man has many grand and noble faculties about him. I think that we can see that this is most clearly seen in the sciences, technology, the arts and literature, and in these areas there seems to be a natural source of inspiration and motivation that causes man's mind and his hands to bring forth creation, both of beauty and practicality; and so we can build graceful, soaring bridges, tall buildings. We can produce electricity-producing dams, stadiums, machines, and appliances to lessen labor; automobiles, trains, airplanes, and other craft to carry people into outer space. We can design and produce colorful, flower-bedecked golf course-like parks for people to relax and picnic in.

But did you notice the word "heart"? The fact still remains that in spiritual things man is without a *natural* knowledge, or love, or fear of God. In fact, even the great unconverted minds of this planet—people who have no relationship at all with God, and yet are endowed with searching minds of very great capacity—to them, man is an enigma. Now their source of wonderment and exasperation about man is that man is so soaring, so grand in his conception and execution of material things, and yet so groveling and debased in his affections.

They wonder by what peculiar and perverted twist of mind a man will debase himself and will grovel before a drug, alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, and in some cases even food. That they will willfully destroy their own lives on the installment plan, and even go to murder in order to satisfy a feeling. They wonder what drives us to compete so intensely that we will go to war to satisfy a desire. They wonder why some are so self-centered that they will lose their temper and use it as a battering ram, even to intimidate another person into insensibility and get them to do or believe something that they do not want to.

What is equally mystifying to them is that this enigma is universal. It does not matter where they search, there is no perfect society, there is no perfect civilization. These philosophers and anthropologists find that even in what they consider a "stone age" culture—one that has almost no contact with technologically-advanced Western culture, where people are ignorant of churches, books, movies, television, money, ghettos, schools, organized crime, atomic weapons—that the people are nonetheless involved in a lust for drugs, murder, torture, vicious competition, wife- and child-stealing, sexual perversion, war, mutilation of the body, deceit, and superstition.

Everywhere, at any time in history, people *know* how to sin, and they practice it as a way of life to varying degrees of intensity. So rooted is it, that even after we are converted, after we are forgiven, after we are washed by the blood of Jesus Christ, justified, made members of Christ's spiritual body, it persistently remains as a part of our life. Why? It may be checked, but it is *still* there.

Where does this come from? Now it is all too easy to pass this off maybe as unimportant and place the blame for sin where it does not belong, because we want to justify its existence in our lives to ourselves and others. I think that this needs to be chased out, and so in order to do so, I want to return to a point that I touched on earlier in this series. It was actually several sermons ago. But this time I want to nail it down more clearly. It is very easy to blame our sin on Satan, poor parenting, bad peers, being poor because we grew up in a ghetto. But brethren, that is an evasion of truth. Every one of us has seemingly ready-made justifications to clear ourselves of guilt, rather than humbly admitting our wrong.

Last week, Darryl Henson in his sermon mentioned Flip Wilson. I want you to "flip" your mind back to that again. Flip Wilson made the statement or the exclamation that, "The devil made me do it it," famous. And everybody would roar with laughter. At least maybe they would snicker, but they would laugh, inside or outside. There was kind of an elevation of humor there. Do you know why? Because everybody knew it was a justification. Everybody knew it was an evasion, a lie. Everybody knew that they had used this themselves.

Now I am not saying that everybody who laughed understood clearly where sin came from, but they understood enough to know that Flip Wilson was lying through his teeth. They knew that we choose to lie, and frequently, consciously, choose to sin. They knew that nobody was twisting their arms. They knew that even though there is pressure to sin, that the major problem is within themselves.

Brethren, did Satan *make* Adam and Eve sin in the Garden of Eden? God recorded that event, and in it there is a microcosm showing that Satan did *not* make them sin. There is no doubt that he played a part. He deceived Eve, but only after she *permitted* the deception—and Adam standing there said nothing. Now he did not make them sin, but sin in its most powerful form was there, because he was present and he was ready to enter in.

Let us begin to lay a true foundation for this subject by going back to a section of Scripture that we most frequently look at for other reasons, in John the 3rd chapter and verse 6, (you know, "You must be born again.") But there is a statement there that I want to begin with that has something to do with where sin comes from. Jesus said:

John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh.

We are going to see as we go through this that flesh is used in the Bible in a number of ways, and the context determines the way we should understand its application. In this case, here it is contrasted to spirit life. So flesh here simply means "human." It means "mortal." We are flesh. We are not spirit. We are humans. We are not angels, and we are not God.

Now let us go to another scripture and begin to layer this with some things that will reveal more. Another familiar scripture, this time in I Corinthians the 2nd chapter and in verse 11. This is that section that says that "eye has not seen, nor ear heard," then verse 10, "God has revealed them to us through His Spirit," and then verse 11 says:

I Corinthians 2:11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

There is an interesting contrast there that has to do with where sin comes from. We are mortal, and we add to that the fact that God gave us the "human" spirit. We will call it that, following what Mr. Armstrong did, because he could come up with no better title, I guess you might say, for what it is that makes that component God has put into a man that gives us the power of mind—a spirit in man. But that spirit is not angelic spirit. That spirit is not God Spirit. God gave us a spirit that is the spiritual equivalent of flesh—mortal flesh.

This section here in I Corinthians 2 shows us very clearly that the human spirit, the spirit that God put in our fleshly mortal bodies in order to give us the power of mind, is *very* keen in regard to physical things; but in regard to the spiritual things of God, it does not know God from a horse. The human spirit does not know the true God, despite the fact that men claim that all humans have a bit of

the divine in them. That is what the Protestant world says. That is what the Catholic world says. But this section says that *God must be revealed*.

Let us add to this. We are not going to turn to these scriptures, but they are good to help understand what I mean here, because they expand, give us a little bit of understanding on the human spirit's capabilities. You might recall in Romans 3 Paul goes off on about a 10-verse explanation of the mind of man, beginning in Romans 3:10, and it ends about verse 17 or 18, somewhere around there, that it begins (Romans 3:12), "There is none who does good." (Romans 3:11) "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God."

That is an astounding statement! But you see, the human spirit simply does not have the capabilities to enable it to relate in a truthful honest way to God. So without God's calling, we do not by nature have it in us to seek after the true God. We *will* seek after God. Is that not what Romans said? They turned God into the lie—an idol, and worshipped the creation rather than the Creator. That is the way of the human spirit.

Again, just rehearse in your mind the Garden of Eden story, and that story reveals that Adam and Eve, with the spirit in man—but without the Spirit of God—human nature naturally sought out Satan and rejected God, even though they had a visible relationship with God. You see the way the human spirit reacted? I mean, right after the creation, they immediately rejected God and went the way that Satan offered to them, because that was the *inclination* that was in the spirit of man. It was not that they hated God. It was that the spirit in man simply did not have a natural inclination to the true God, even though He had just created them, and even though they saw Him with their own eyes, and even though He spoke to them.

Now let us go from here to Galatians the 5th chapter and verses 16 and 17. Paul says:

Galatians 5:16-17 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Remember this is spoken to people in the church—converted people. What Paul says here is that the spirit in man and the Spirit of God are naturally, fundamentally *opposed* to one another. Is it any wonder there is none who does good? There is none who seeks after God? They are naturally opposed to one another. In this context, flesh is contrasted with spirit in such a way as to imply something different from what it did in John 3:6. Here flesh means, or is the equivalent of, "nature" rather than composition. By flesh, Paul means the natural man as he thinks and acts without the Godward influence of the Holy Spirit. Another way of putting it is, "an unconverted person."

Now let us go to the next book, in Ephesians 2 and in verses 1 through 3, and this makes this very clear, but we are still not done. There is a lot more after we get to this verse. Again, written to converted people—the church:

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked [conducted your life] according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience [Boy! That will hardly endear us to God.], among whom also we all once

conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh [using it here a little bit differently actually as it is in Galatians 5], fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, just as the others.

That really nails it down! How can we seek God, how can we do good, as God perceives good, if we do not have a nature that will seek after Him, and that is opposed, contrasted, at war with God—that we are by nature children of wrath? So therefore, brethren, it is in our nature to sin. God gave us a nature, by creation, that is oriented to the physical. He gave us a nature that has ability to create great beauty and produce wonderful technological achievements, but at the same time to be morally ambivalent because of an inclination to put the self and the physical first in priority.

Now here comes an interesting twist—and that is, nowhere in Paul's writings, or for that matter in any of the Bible's writers' writings (but I use Paul because he used the term most frequently)—does he identify flesh with sin *per se*. In other words, he does not say the flesh is sin. There is a reason why, for to do so would be to accuse God of sin, you see, in creating it that way. Rather he uses it in the sense of a drive or inclination to go away from God, to resist God rather than submit or follow God—not because it is naturally evil, but because it is naturally unenlightened.

That is an important distinction. Not because God created it naturally evil, but rather because it is naturally unenlightened. There is a big difference. If God created that spirit evil, where would the free moral agency be? But if He created us with a spirit that was unenlightened, but could be educated in either direction—do you begin to get the drift? Because that is exactly what He did.

Now recall what Mr. Armstrong said. Time and time again I heard him say this, and that is, God gave us a spirit that is essentially neutral, but does have a heavier pull or whatever, to the self—a somewhat stronger pull toward the self. Remember this statement, and that is, that the nature itself is not naturally evil, but it is naturally unenlightened.

Ephesians 4:17-18 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk not as rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind [Now look at this next phrase.], having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.

There you have it in a nutshell. That is so clear. God created a spirit, or gave us a spirit that, brethren, is in the dark—at least to moral and spiritual things. It is not in the dark in regard to physical things at all. The vanity of the mind, having the understanding *darkened* through the ignorance that is in them. Did you ever see a baby come out of the womb already a college graduate? Everybody starts off from ground zero. Unfortunately some people are handicapped and they are below ground zero when they get started. Maybe you feel that way.

But you see, we have a spirit that empowers our brain in order that we might have mind. When we begin life, there is a pull toward the self that is already there. At that point it is neutral morally and spiritually. Now let us add to this. If you can think again of John 3:6 and I Corinthians 2:11 and what they say—to be naturally evil would be to be evil because God created us that way. But to be naturally darkened means that we are operating blindly in relation to the true God, and the chance of sinning and having it ingrained in our character is then very high. In other words, from the moment of conception, it operates in darkness as far as the true God is concerned. Thus it is very easily influenced into sin.

Now being in darkness, what happens then? Again, think of a natural situation. If you are in pitch black darkness like I have been in Carlsbad Caverns, boy! I will tell you, when they turned out the lights, I was afraid to move, because if I moved I would surely have run into one of those things that was either hanging down from the ceiling or sticking up from the ground. I would have gone off the path in no time at all.

Now just transfer that illustration into life itself in relationship to the true God. Yes, we have a yearning for God that is in our minds, but we have no idea where to look. So what do we all do? What have we done from the beginning? We have come up with the lie—with idols, and pursued those things, rather than the true God. I will tell you, you cannot stay on the path—that means to trespass (*paratoma* in Greek), and if you were trying to hit the bull's eye in the dark, you would (*harmartia*) miss the mark. We have all done it. Now let us turn to another place. We are not done adding to this.

Colossians 2:18-19 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.

We can be vainly puffed up. That appears with the word "fleshly." Here fleshly is used to show the natural mind gets puffed up without reason; but through its self-centered indulgence, it inflates the ego through feeling. Now this will become important just a little bit later. Let me give you some definitions of the word "nature," because we run across that a number of times. First of all from the *Reader's Digest Encyclopedic Dictionary*:

Nature means the fundamental qualities or characteristics that together define the identity of something; the essential character; the overall pattern or systems of natural objects."

That is very interesting, because we are a natural object, a creation of God—"the overall pattern or system of natural objects." Remember, we are by nature children of wrath.

The principal or power that appears to guide the natural object.

From *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*:

The inherent character or basic constitution of a person or thing. An inner force or the sum of such forces in an individual. Its synonyms are essence, disposition, and temperament.

Now the word "nature" came into the English from middle French, but has its roots in the Latin *nacsi*, which is the past participle of the verb "to be born." In plain and simple words, then, putting these things together, we are born with a nature whose basic, inherent, moral characteristic disposition is toward sin. It is not inherently evil, but its disposition is *toward* sin. In this case then, because it is blind to God and God's truth and does not rightly understand these things when it hears them, and when we are born, it is with a mind that must work within its own resources, and those resources do not include a true natural knowledge of or understanding of God and His truth.

Let us go back to the book of Matthew, in chapter 15.

Matthew 15:17-20 "Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

Again think back to Romans 1. God very clearly shows that when He did reveal Himself, apparently to those Gentiles there, what did they do? They did just like Adam and Eve. They immediately turned away from God, and then, because the potential was there, they went into all of those filthy sins that Paul mentioned. It was not that God put those sins in them, but the human mind was capable of doing them and following its inclination away from the true God because it was in darkness, and it did those things.

Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind [the fleshly mind] is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Really, in a way, what that is is just a stronger stating of what Galatians 5:16-17 say. Now let us go back to the Old Testament. We are going to pick up a couple of scriptures there. Again these are familiar ones, but putting these together in this way helps us to get a grip on where sin comes from.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked [or incurably sick, or incurably ill]; who can know it?

This verse is important because it adds another element that is important to those of us who are converted. That is, that this spirit in man from which our nature develops, is incurably sick. It cannot be changed. If you begin to get the inference that is there (there are two of them), in order for us to operate in a way that is pleasing to God, we *must* be given a different spirit, and that God never intended from the very beginning that the spirit He gives us when we are born be the spirit that we operate on for all time and merely alter when we are converted. In other words, to make something good out of man, it is going to take an entirely new nature.

Jeremiah 10:23 O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

Brethren, it just is not there! I do not know what I can add to that. *It is just not there.*

Let us add one more to this section. We are looking at one of the last books written before the canon of the Bible was complete, and God inspired John to write:

I John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

God has given us a human nature that when He decides to call us and open our minds by means of His Spirit and reveal Himself—which also means that He reveals what He is doing with mankind—by the time He does this, there is already a force, a character, an essence, a nature within us which must be overcome, because it is anti-God. It is at war with God, and yet it is there. And it is this nature, this spirit which provides resistance to the divine nature, and it ensures that each and every

person called will have been tested and proven on the field of battle—regardless of sex, regardless of race, age of calling, level of education, status in society, when they lived in history, or where they lived their lifetime out. Every single one of us is fighting the same basic battle, and this is why there is so much stress in the Bible on overcoming, and why the receiving of God's Spirit is so important.

There is no redeeming human nature. The way is not in it; it is at war with God, and by creation it is weighted toward the things of man, and that is toward the physical and therefore the self, rather than being equally weighted toward man and heavily weighted toward God. It must be replaced by the divine nature. God never intended that it merely be altered, that is, human nature, that we might appear respectable to the general public, because Christianity is not mere respectability.

There is much sin hidden behind a façade of respectability and public acceptance. Christianity is a way of life in which sin—that old nature—is overcome; and when lived in a relationship with the Creator, God will produce the image of God in us—glorify Himself, and we will be witnesses of Him. God is more than respectable. *He is holy*. He has given us His Holy Spirit, and He expects us to become holy, and we become holy by the use of that Spirit in overcoming the old nature—the one that provides the resistance.

Now we have to get back to something. What about Satan? What about poor parenting? What about the pressure of peers? What about the ghetto? What about violent entertainments and reading material—pornography, whatever? Well, except for Satan, every one of them is a product of human nature, and those elements work *with* human nature, aiding and abetting sin to intensify and multiply it. But they are not ultimately responsible for the inclination to sin, but rather for increasing its manifestation, giving us the opportunity to sin more and more.

We still have not gotten yet to where sin comes from. We have dug pretty deeply.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Notice—"sin **entered**." That ought to be encouraging, because Adam and Eve were not created with a sinful nature by creation. We are no different. When we come out of our mother's womb, we have the same kind of mind that Adam and Eve did. Sin *enters*. It entered Adam and Eve, and entered then into the world.

Remember I said earlier that in the Garden of Eden sin was present. *It was present in the person of Satan*. Now the answer as to where sin comes from ought to be very clear. *Sin began with Satan*. I mean it ultimately began with him, and then sin entered into the world.

Let us think about Satan for a while. Did God create Satan to sin? There is no indication of that in the Bible. He too chose to sin. He did not have to sin, but God did give him, and apparently all the angels, a nature that *could* sin, but was not created to sin. That is one of the reasons why his sin is so tragic, because he had even less reason to sin than we do, because he could see God. Therefore the requirements of trust were not nearly as high as it is with us.

Sometime during the passage of time, vanity entered into his thinking through pride in his beauty. Now his beauty was not just his appearance. That word "beauty" represented his power, his position, his influence, his intelligence. All of these things together gradually made him think that he was God's equal, or greater, and that he did not need God.

I want you to think about that in relation to the Laodiceans. The Laodiceans say to God, "I have need of nothing." If you want to know how vile Laodiceanism is, think on that a while.

Now back to the story here. As it was with Satan, so it also is with us. When God re-created the earth in preparation for man, sin was already present because Satan was already there; but sin entered the world when sin entered Adam and Eve, and sin entered through the presence of Satan and his influence. Now they (Adam and Eve) in their pride quickly turned their backs on God; but Satan did not make them sin anymore than God made Satan sin. Paul thus shows the flesh, the natural man, is not essentially sinful by creation, but it is actually sinful through sin, because sin, like a drug, has entered in from the outside of him and begins a process of dominating him from the moment that he is born.

I tell you, the analogy of sin with a drug is so beautiful. It is so close, it is incredible, and God says the whole world is *drunk* on a drug—the wine of the wrath of her fornication—a sin. How does a drug get into the body? It enters in because the person puts it in, and the same thing happens with sin. Sin enters in because the person makes the choice to put it in. Is that not what the Garden of Eden experience shows? Satan did not make them sin. He was there. The presence of sin was there, but Adam and Eve chose to put it inside them by yielding to him, rather than God. So sin enters and it begins the process of dominating the person until that person is its slave.

Let us go back again to the book of Proverbs, in chapter 22 and in verse 15. I want you to think of a word here in relation to something that I said in another sermon on this subject just a couple of weeks ago. I gave an illustration in that sermon that involved folly, that involved foolishness, and I did that because I wanted to illustrate to all of us very clearly how easy it is to sin.

Proverbs 22:15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction will drive it far from him.

It is good to remember that when you see that adorable, innocent-looking baby smiling and cooing in its mother's arms, or from its cradle or crib, that you are also looking at the budding germs of deceit, of lust, of evil temper, of jealousy, obstinacy, greed, intense competitiveness, perhaps even murder, and a multitude of forms of selfishness. If that self-centeredness—the pull to the self that is already there, see, in the spirit, in the nature—is indulged and encouraged, sin will shoot up with great rapidity and begin to take over the child and dominate it, making it a slave.

The best of parenting cannot completely cork human nature. But that does not mean that we should not strive to do so with our children, but we must also understand that the inclination to corruption is already there in the nature, and that is the very reason why we should strive to guide the child away from the manifestations of human nature. I do not know how many times, but in the newspaper, television interviews, whatever it might be, counseling, that I heard parents say about a wayward child, that the child was just fine until he got into a bad group and chose the wrong friends. That is another evasion of the whole truth.

Remember what Adam and Eve did? Was God a foolish parent? Remember He was the only parent they had. Did He just cast them out without instruction? Hardly. God would not avoid or deny Himself the responsibility of teaching His children. So they immediately though, chose the wrong lord and master even though the very best Parent who has ever lived was there. You see, the wayward child, whether Adam and Eve, or one of ours, or whatever, simply respected his friends more than his parents, or he would not have gone bad. The "fear of God" principle.

Now parents do not like to admit to something like that, because it reflects upon and it wounds their pride. But the seeds of self-justification are already in human nature. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and incurably sick. But if those parents were honest, they would look back over the child's life and see their *own* pattern of ignorance and neglect in rearing the child. We are all guilty.

Let us go back again toward the front of the book to Genesis the 6th chapter. I mentioned a couple of times of the fertile soil of sin which is in human nature, and if it is fed, nurtured, cultured, sin takes root and begins to dominate until it possesses the person. Now this verse will show you how far sin can go.

Genesis 6:5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Ah! That is a sick laugh you hear here. I mean a laugh of futility, or hopelessness. I do not know of any other verse in the Bible that shows more clearly the extent that sin can be taken. It almost seems impossible to even imagine a world totally given over to such corrupt thinking. *Every thought of the imagination of his heart—of EVERYBODY, except Noah, sick, and that is where we are headed—*toward a world like that.

One thing we can learn from this is that sin just does not merely affect the acts that we do, it effects every part of our moral constitution—every faculty of our mind. That is why we can invent evil things. It affects our understanding, our perspective of things. You know, a good understanding have all they that do His commandments. You break His commandments, you do not have a good understanding. It affects the understanding. It affects our affections. It affects our reasoning powers. It affects our will, and even our conscience is very, very greatly affected.

I want you to look at this, addressed to church members. Again, back in I Corinthians 8. This is in regard to the conscience, to show you that sin affects us so greatly, even after conversion, that to some extent our conscience cannot be trusted as a guide.

I Corinthians 8:7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

This is to church members.

I Corinthians 8:10-12 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

Now he is talking here about the conscience of Christians. The conscience is that faculty within us that decides the moral quality of our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. But as this series of verses shows, it can be misleading regarding what one should do if one's convictions are not strong. Notice that these people have a conscience which is still somewhat favorably disposed toward an idol as though it really is something of consequence, and the conduct of the offending brother produces an uncertainty that throws them into a spiritual quandary.

Let us look at another scripture that shows how far sin can go in a society. This was in Judah not too long before it fell:

Isaiah 1:4-6 Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children that are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they are gone away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment.

This is a pretty graphic picture of sin, you see, which has enslaved an entire nation. Sin is bent on dominating each individual. Sin is portrayed in the Bible as a living entity, having the potential to dominate a person's life until a person's nature is changed by the receiving of God's Spirit, which in turn then enables the person to successfully overcome sin's pervasive and destroying influence.

Brethren, we sin because the potential is there and we take advantage of it. Now no one makes us sin, but since the potential is always there and because our nature can be influenced in that way—Satan, this world, and our peers, and our own drives influence us; but nobody can *make* us sin. We have got to understand that. Sin is something we *choose* to do—sometimes in ignorance, sometimes inadvertently, sometimes through negligence, sometimes willingly, and sometimes even willfully; but it is God's purpose that we chose to do the good, rather than sin, and we know that sometimes this puts us into *great* consternation.

Now let us go to that series of scriptures that Paul wrote in Romans 7. In Romans 7 Paul recounts how sin became exceedingly sinful to him, as God led him to conversion—so much so, that he *died* in the waters of baptism. Very picturesque language. He shows there that it was the law of God which was the major instrument that revealed his sinfulness to him, and that it, the law, is holy, just, and good. But then beginning in verse 13 he is now converted.

Romans 7:13-15 Has then what is good made death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that do I not practice; but what I hate, that do I.

This is a converted man, showing what a power sin exerted.

Romans 7:16-17 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Remember sin is shown in the Bible as a living entity that has a grip on the person, and it is just as if this living entity so dominates that it pushes it way out, even when we might be trying to cork it.

Romans 7:18-25 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil which I will not do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God

according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Now he is saying in verse 13 on, through the first 4, 5 or 6 verses there, that after he was baptized he found to his dismay, that even after receiving God Holy Spirit, that sin still dwelt in him seemingly more powerful than ever. But was it really more powerful? No, it was not more powerful. But Paul was simply more *aware* of its presence and the dominance of his character and personality.

You see, before God began educating Paul about Himself—God—and about God's way, though Paul had a cursory knowledge about the law of God, he did not understand it—he did not see it; he did not grasp it; he did not see its refinements—like he did until after God did this revelation in his mind, and he began to realize that his former awareness had been shallow and purely academic. But now sin was a powerful reality that he could not conveniently ignore, but had to do battle with it on a daily basis, and he found himself so frequently losing struggles to its power.

Now where does sin's power lie in a converted person? In his habits, in the way the person habitually thinks, in the way the person habitually reacts—those inclinations, impulses, and perspectives that have developed from the time of birth. And it is this that Paul refers to as "the law of sin and death," "the law of God after the inward man," and "the law of his mind." They are one and the same. They are his converted mind—the mind to which the life-giving influence of the divine nature has been given. In the person to whom sin and overcoming is serious business, there is a *mighty* struggle which, like Paul, we all too frequently lose.

Now these verses are not intended to make us think Paul was going around sinning all the time, and then excusing himself. *God forbid*. He would not have stayed as God's apostle were he doing that. It was a matter that, as he matured, sin in himself became *increasingly visible* to him. As he matured he was increasingly able to see refinements of the awesome difference between God's holiness and himself. It was the very education that God was giving him that made him seem so sinful. Now he was sinful, and what he is doing here is saying "I now see it. I didn't see it before."

If there is anything that I have learned in the study for these sermons, something has become more deeply impressed on my mind during this than it ever has before, and that is, without the justification and the forgiveness that is supplied through the blood of Jesus Christ, I am sunk! I am hopelessly lost, and so are you, and you and I are as good as dead.

That is going to have to remain as a subject for another sermon, because as we will see, I have already got it started, and we will see this is where our hope lies. But it is absolutely necessary for God to make us so aware of sin in us, like Paul was aware of it here in Romans the 7th chapter. That we will turn to Him and beseech Him with all of our being for forgiveness and help, beseeching Him for every gift that He can give us, in order that we might overcome. We will see that the strength of our salvation lies in the blood of Jesus Christ.