

***For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. (Psa 38:4)***

Let's spend a little time today talking about sin. The offensiveness of sin to God is impossible to articulate, but we should do what we can to frame it up properly in our minds and hearts. I've had a couple of experiences lately that make me think we need to discuss some basic ideas to bring everyone to the same place.

I have heard some version of this comment a few times of late – "This or that person is a righteous person because they don't commit the sin of <insert sin here>"; or the converse – that the person who commits this or that sin is clearly unrighteous.

This is a legalistic view of things. Legalistic perspectives eat away at our faith, and it's important that we strive to replace legalistic views with ones of faith.

Friends, we dwell in the muck of this world's outrageous sinfulness, doing what we can to warn against the dangers of these egregious errors and trespasses. While we seek to make sin exceedingly sinful and to speak very plainly on behalf of our King, we spend so much time focused on what we can see, it is easy to forget some basic truths. I also believe that the amount of time we spend dealing in these issues and working to communicate the danger of them can actually desensitize us to certain aspects of sin. It can create an unintentional sense of self-righteousness that takes attention to guard against. We see the filth around us and elevate ourselves because we don't see ourselves participating in that filth. That doesn't make us sinless or righteous.

This can be hard to grapple with and get our arms around, because we spend so much time focused on sinful activity in our warnings. It is a central part of our ministry to make sin appear as it is – utterly offensive to God. Preaching to people the necessity of fleeing from sin and repenting of it is an absolute must. Fleeing from sin and repenting of it is required of Christ's followers. But seeing some sin committed by a person and thinking you have the full and definitive understanding of their salvation or that you get to designate who is Godly by what sins you see in them? No, my friends, we tread a VERY dangerous path when we wander into those ways. This issue is a critical thing to properly understand, especially as we consider our own election and salvation.

Judging a person's righteousness based solely on an outward appearance or our sense of their sin has us participating in a doctrine of legalistic works righteousness, which then separates us from union with Christ. By judging based on these outward things, especially judging members of this body, we operate in the same way the Pharisees did.

I want you to bear with me in this analysis and come to me after with your questions or even challenges. This is an important construct to understand and get our thinking right with Scripture.

Let me start by establishing two facts: 1) sin is not just the commission of a deed and 2) the elect, though righteous in Jesus Christ, are not exempt from the commission of any and all sins in the catalog of human depravity due to their nature.

**FACT #1:** Committing sin doesn't require action to be taken.

I raised this point a couple of sermons ago, and I want to drive it home fully today if possible. I don't think this is looked at often enough. This point is important to understanding our nature and what it is we are warring against.

*"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."* (Rom 7:23)

This war doesn't start when we put our hand to a sin. Our members don't just do things free of our minds. This war is one of the mind and heart, which is what Paul is talking about here. It is constantly present within us. It has always been this way.

*"And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."* (Gen 6:5)

Every imagination of the hearts of men is evil continually, by our nature. It is only when, by grace and the new man being born in us that the law of our mind gains any influence and keeps our hands from wickedness. That doesn't make our **consideration** of committing a sin **not** sinful just because we didn't put our hands to it. God didn't fundamentally change the nature of man after the waters of the flood receded.

*"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."* (Rom 8:7)

**We are not excluded from this truth. Our carnal, or natural, mind is enmity against God. This is the mind of the old man that still lives in us even as called sheep.**

When we preach against sin, that preaching doesn't exclude our sin. Sin is egregious and offensive to God in a way that might be difficult for us to truly comprehend. We aren't the ones being aggrieved by sin, being offended by their foul stench or our holiness assaulted. God's perfect holiness is a thing that cannot be lessened by sin, but sin is most certainly an assault on it and a vile offense against it.

Christ tells us plainly that you don't have to commit a physical act to have sinned against God:

*"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."* (Mat 5:27-28)

Focus on the phrase "in his heart". David also speaks to this

*"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."* (Psa 66:18)

This term 'regard' is a primitive root that means a good number of things, including *to consider, approve, advise self (as in planning), and make to enjoy*. This is a regarding of iniquity with an eye to committing it, not regarding it with a mindset of avoiding it. What David is telling us is that all it takes to separate us temporarily from God, especially hearing our prayers, is a sinful thought. It doesn't take committing a deed. There is abundant iniquity in the heart of the elect just as there is in the reprobate.

"I didn't do it, so I'm good" is a self-justifying and conscience-relieving lie we tell ourselves, a delusion we build to make ourselves feel holy.

While we're busy looking at someone and declaring them to be unrighteous because of some sin that has been exposed, we ought to be considering the sins we have committed against God in our mind and heart and seriously consider what we're doing. Our sins are as numerous and grave.

Friends, I make no accusation against anyone when I make this point, because I have done this countless times in my life, thinking that since I didn't **do a thing**, I'm right in the sight of God; but seriously, we delude ourselves with that thinking. We do a great disservice to our fellow elect looking at them in this manner, as well.

Christ tells us our sinful thoughts are sins of the same magnitude as our sinful actions. Sinful thoughts **are** sinful actions. If that causes some sort of heartburn, I'm glad to talk about it more, but Scripture is pretty plain here.

By telling ourselves it's ok if we didn't "do it", whatever "it" is, we deny the full magnitude and scope of the sin. It is a lie of the flesh that the so-called "doing" is somehow worse than the "thinking of it". That is flesh-speak.

"But", one might say, "surely actually fulfilling the lust, or raising the hand to strike someone down and kill them, **surely** in God's eyes that is worse! It **has** to be."

Here is the problem – in making that argument we argue with **God** and **His word**, and we seek to create some fleshly spectrum of sins that are in our mind more or less

sinful, and to put this as plainly as possible – we do so to justify our own sins. “If I didn’t do what they did, I must be better than them”. We demonstrate a weakness of faith in Christ because we are trying to accomplish our own salvation and applying an anti-Scriptural standard that sins of the mind and heart are outweighed by sins of the body. There aren’t seven deadly sins – all sins are deadly. Put another way, there are no little sins. I encourage everyone with the most effervescent energy to stop thinking that. Please just stop thinking that. The wages of **all** sin is death.

Just because we, in our public ministry focus on the most prevalent sins of our age, some of the most filthy, fleshly things men corrupt themselves with, we cannot elevate ourselves or think that our sins are somehow diminished or less egregious to our Creator. In that thinking is the danger of the flatterer, and it is the most dangerous type of flattery – self-flattery.

Our flesh argues that killing the person must be worse than just contemplating it. On some level of human reason that makes sense, but in making the argument we fail to comprehend **who it is that is offended by sin**.

Taking a person's life is absolutely horrific and an affront to God. But here's the thing Matthew 5 shows us! The thought of doing it is itself an affront to God Almighty! And under the law, there is no sliding scale!

**Conniving** in our hearts to consider a "doing" requires just as much confession before God and seeking of repentance as a "doing" does. This should be apparent if we consider that there are plainly sins that never culminate in anything that could be called a “doing”. We can sin with our mind, our heart, our lips, not only with our hands!

We might ask "Why would this be the case that my thought about snuffing out a life is just as egregious to God as snuffing it out?"

I think there’s a blessedly simple answer.

In seeking anything outside the current situation God has provided us we violate this commandment:

*“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.” (Exo 20:17)*

Covetousness isn't a sin of deeds. It is a sin of thoughts. When we covet a change to our situation, whether that's our spouse, our job, our material wealth, our state of affliction, whatever it is, when we veer away from accepting and being thankful for our state of affairs, we **sin against God**. Before we’ve actually done something, we are guilty of sin.

**FACT #2:** The righteous are capable of and indeed do commit sins across the entire spectrum of human depravity.

David says with great feeling about his behavior toward Uriah and Bathsheeba "against thee, thee only, have I sinned" at Ps. 51:4. David killed Uriah, but it is **against the Lord he sinned**. Please grasp this. When we sin, we sin against the holiest of all entities in the entirety of existence. It is more of an affront than any affront that is or ever has been affronted toward another human. One sin is more of an affront to God than **all** the affronts men have committed against other men in all human history. It is certainly more of an affront than anything ever done to us personally. Each sin is a grotesque violation of His authority and denies His purity and holiness as being the standard we are called to.

In Psalm 51 David, the beloved of God, is confessing at least three sins – covetousness, adultery, and murder. In examining his behavior, which of those would you declare that "the righteous of God don't commit those types of sins" and judge David to be a heathen?

These examples in Scripture are not provided to us as some entertaining allegory. This wasn't a fictional character engaged in a theoretical plot to sin. This was a real man, declared one of God's beloved, committing heinous, grievous sins. This ought to make it very plain that God's people sin. It ought to crush any thinking that we can judge a person as righteous or not due to our seeing them in a sin (by itself).

Paul goes to great lengths to make this point to the church at Rome. I highly recommend a serious and thorough study of the whole book of Romans to grasp this concept of our righteousness in Christ versus the natural depravity we all carry in us. We are sinners and only saved from the consequences by Christ's righteousness being imputed to us.

I want to answer some objections I have heard from cardboard Christians and even a few friends, in an attempt to make some of these points more practical. Paul spent a lot of time discussing this idea and answering some of these objections and so it bears our study and careful consideration.

**Objection: we only have a person's actions or words to judge them by, and if they walk in sin we have to judge by that**

As we are not the discerners of the heart this is true. We must use what we can see and hear from a person to discern the legitimacy of their profession and their walking with Christ. People claiming to be Christian are absolutely required to bring forth fruits meet for repentance along with a profession of faith and to demonstrate their faith through obedience (1 Jn 5:2). Speaking to that and those standards is perfectly fine.

What we can't do is make some claim on their eternal salvation. That's the importance of understanding the "God Hates You" sign. We're not saying to any one individual that we know whether they're saved. We're saying – in direct opposition to cardboard Christianity – that the default position for all men is God's hatred, and only by God's invisible grace is that changed. I don't think that's a particularly nuanced thing to understand, but it is important to understand it.

When judging a person who has fallen into some sin, we can't judge them by the commission of the sin alone. If we do that, we better be prepared to be judged that same way, and none of us can stand under that weight!! That's what Christ tells us at Matthew 7!

**Objection: I am a new creature in Christ and all old things have become new, so my body of sin is destroyed – “*Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*” (Rom 6:6)**

It is easy to forget that being born again is the introduction of the new man, it is not the complete destruction of the old; nor is the new man in a matured state. This is one of the great mysteries of Christ and salvation, that here in the same flesh, we have two warring factions. Paul is not saying in Romans 6 that the old man, the carnal flesh, is destroyed here and now – that would require us to be physically dead.

I've had some really smart theological school graduates argue that this verse literally means that part of us is dead. This can't mean that, though, when Paul a short time later relates his own experience as an example to us

*“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.” (Rom 7:23)*

This war is real for God's people. We still have these fleshly, corrupt bodies, but the regenerated spirit that is in us knows the evil of sin and wars to put it away. Until we put off this flesh, we must battle. That means sin is still present in us and by implication may occasionally win the field.

**Objection: we are under grace through Christ Jesus, and I confess Him, so sin has no dominion over me – “*For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*” (Rom 6:14)**

This is a similar, though slightly different objection. It focuses less on whether there is sin still present and rather on whether it overcomes us. The problem with the argument is it misunderstands dominion.

What Paul tells us is that ultimately, we will not be overcome by the condemnation of sin. That doesn't mean we aren't going to fall into sin. That's the point of not being "under the law". If you're under the law, you must suffer the consequences of that law for sin. In this flesh, we will at times be overcome by temptation and have our faith tried with sin. But ultimately, because we are under grace, we can rest, as the grace of repentance is granted to us, that being in Christ we will not suffer the final price for that sin. Sin will not have dominion and final control over us even though we commit it.

**Objection: if we are horrible sinners, we must forthwith remove these beams from our eyes and not preach against sin on the streets**

Boy, Satan would love this. Just whisper in our ears that due to our sinfulness we have no right to express God's displeasure of sin and sinners.

Let's be super clear on this point, my friends. Every messenger that God has sent to preach against sin has been a sinner.

*"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" (Rom 3:23)*

There aren't any asterisks, exceptions or footnotes on this "all". It is a literal "all", meaning every single individual of created mankind. God doesn't send faultless people to deliver His messages and He's under no obligation to do so. Isaiah experiences this very feeling

*"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." (Isa 6:5-7)*

His messengers are qualified as messengers **by Him**. That doesn't mean we get to willy-nilly disregard our sins, and must strive against hypocrisy, but sins you are repentant of and sorrowful for don't disqualify you as His messenger. We don't get to disregard our obligation because we recognize our sinfulness.

**Objection: We cannot exercise discipline in the body if we don't address sins**

This is true. But I haven't once made the argument that we ought not address sin. What I've said is that we are not equipped to judge a person's election because they committed a sin we know about.

In disciplining ourselves as a body, when someone is found to be caught in a fault, our first order of business isn't exclusion, and that isn't our only remedy; it certainly isn't

some sort of salvational judgment. It isn't to hold a person up to contempt. Paul tells us what our first focus ought to be

*“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”*  
(Gal 6:1)

Remember that this is shortly after Paul says

*“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”* (Gal 5:9)

The automatic conclusion shouldn't be that the sin we **see** a person has committed is the only leaven working itself into the lump. Our first thought should absolutely **not be** “oh dear we're at such horrible risk of angering God because this sinner is in our midst!”. Consider yourself, consider that the sins you commit in your heart are **just as damning, just as leavening**, and exposing the body to **just as much risk** as the sin you see in them. Just because I don't know about the sin of your heart doesn't make me not at risk by it, it just means it hasn't been exposed yet. When we look at a person who has been found in some fault, do we hold ourselves up in our minds as being more righteous because we didn't commit the same sin, ignoring all the sins we commit in our hearts and minds? Or see those sins as less dangerous? Heaven forbid.

None of this means we don't take action when action is necessary to save our candlestick. It means we need to take the right action based on each individual case and consider our **first** order of business is to determine if that brother or sister can be restored, considering our own ability to be tempted in precisely the same manner. A person who is stubbornly going to hold onto their sin, to justify themselves in it, or who is presumptuously sinning (as evidenced by their words as much as their deeds) is a danger and must be dealt with. But none of us are so righteous and holy, so as to be able to determine a person's salvation by a single deed.

Let's talk a minute about presumptuous sins, because I've had some conversations expressing the idea that presumptuous sinning is more than one deed and that changes things. The concept of presumptuous sinning comes out of the law

*“And the man that will do **presumptuously**, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.”* (Deu 17:12)

Presumptuously means to seethe like a boiling pot, to pridefully, rebelliously, insolently sin. It is similar to the idea of a worker of iniquity, being absorbed with sin all day every day and ignoring all warnings against it. Surely there is plenteous evidence against a person like that which makes it okay to judge them, right?



Consider this passage

*“But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. **Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.**” (2Pe 2:10-11)*

If angels don't bring a railing accusation against the presumptuous, how should we regulate our thoughts and words toward those we see as being presumptuous in their sinning? I don't think it's different.

How we look at sin, especially our own sins is important to how we see our unity to Christ. It is natural to elevate ourselves above others, but when we do that, it means we see ourselves as less needful of Christ, by definition. There's a reason so much of Scripture admonishes us to avoid sin, my friends. God's people can't ignore that. If you're spending energy and time looking at people and judging them based on their visible sins, you're not using that energy and time to a positive end.

Now, this could lead us to despair. If we're so full of sin, what hope could there possibly be for us? I don't want us to be in that spot any more than I want us to be in a puffed-up state viewing ourselves as sinless or thinking ourselves righteous to judge people based on a singular view of a sinful act.

Fortunately, Paul addresses this very problem

*“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28)*

The key word here is “all”. There is no asterisk or exception made by Paul in this argument, no parenthetical “except”. It means *exactly* what it seems to mean on its face – each, every, the whole, all things.

So, everything that happens in the life of God's elect works together for their good, including their sins!! Now that might generate a “WHAT!?!” kind of reaction, seeing I just spent a bunch of time reminding us that we are indeed sinful creatures by nature and we should be mindful of how we see that. This might seem oxymoronic that our sins work to our good. Maybe we really shouldn't care about our sins and just do what we want? As Paul says “God forbid”.

*“But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.” (Gal 2:17)*

The reality is that the sins of the elect absolutely do work together for their good. The sin alone doesn't, because sin is destructive. But what is the result of sin in the elect?

*“For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.” (Psa 40:12)*

The sins of the elect weigh on us – heavily – which then drives us to Christ to seek His forgiveness through prayer, which causes us to seek the grace of repentance from Him and to restore us to Him. That drives us to a greater understanding of His mercy and that puts us into greater unity with Christ. This is the opposite of the reprobate, whose sins harden their hearts. Ultimately the chastening for sin strengthens us against future sin.

This isn't a flippant or careless view of our sinfulness. This is a practical and important reality for us to address, because ***we can't escape it***. The cardboard Christian preachers of this generation won't touch this issue. They want to pooh-pooh it away and only talk about what they designate as “the good things” about Christ. Their definition of the Gospel is tainted by their fleshly desires, and it shines through when you listen to what they will say about the sins of God's people.

Being aware of our sinfulness will draw us to this exhortation

*“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:” (2Pe 1:10)*

We aren't making our calling and election sure with God, as He has already written our names in the book and sealed it. There isn't anything that can be more sure than the decision of an immutable God.

*“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (Jas 1:17-18)*

He established this order and nothing will change it – not our obedience, not our sinfulness.

Making our calling and election sure is about making it sure to ourselves. We are exhorted here to make this sure the same way we are exhorted to add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, godliness, etc. – with diligence. We accomplish this diligence through studying the word, and aligning our lives to obedience to Him, being faithful and courageous ambassadors of His way in the earth.

To make our calling and election sure requires intentional, focused and diligent work. We have to examine ourselves and judge ourselves against the plumb line of God's

standards. To do that honestly requires you to know the standards, and to know the standards requires you to delve into the word, to seek understanding of it through prayer, and to work out for ourselves the effectual understanding of our calling. We are working out whether we are indeed converted, whether we have in us that new man, whether Christ has in fact, called us. Because if He has called us, then there is nothing that can separate us from His love. Even our egregious sins.

So we need to be careful to remember when we're dealing with sin in our members that we are not qualified to lay anything to the charge of God's elect (Rom 8:33) and we are by our nature just as guilty as the person we deem unrighteous. If we walk in that frame of mind, we will neither endanger our candlestick nor end up gnashing on each other legalistically. Let us instead be spiritual in our dealings.

*“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” (1Co 2:14-16)*