

**GRACE FOR THE JOURNEY—UNDERSTANDING SIN**  
**Romans 7:15; Colossians 1:13-14**

**Grace For The Journey Message Series**  
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There's an old story of the person who was hired to paint the inside of a warehouse. Thinking that he could make a little extra money he decided to thin the paint way down so he wouldn't have to buy as much. Yet as he came to the end of the project, with a job that had not covered the walls very well, he received a memo from the owner which said, "*Repaint, and thin no more!*"

This morning I will be talking about our understanding of sin. A major truth is that most people in our world today don't have any understanding of what sin really is. In fact, most sin isn't even called that anymore; rather is given a more therapeutic or rational explanation. We are in a time when it is not politically correct to judge or to say that anything a person does is a sin.

Therefore when a man or woman has an affair it means they simply are having a mid-life crisis; that they possibly have some unresolved issues with their family of origin. A person who lies and who always weasels out of taking responsibility for their failures and mistakes now is considered as having low self-esteem; as having a narcissistic personality.

A major problem with sin is that we we don't really understand the definition. It is true that most people today when they hear the word "sin" only think of "sins" with a small 's' as the first letter, and a small 's' at the end. Sins are only those little bad things or mistakes I make each day.

Therefore when I tell that little white lie it's not too bad; when my tongue slips with a swear word or vulgar comment now and then it's not that big a deal; when I speak lies and gossip about someone else—well everybody does that; if I cheat on a test, in a business deal, on my taxes it's not too bad especially if I don't get caught.

I heard it explained one time that what many of us have is a "*ladder theology*." This theology can be pictured by each of us trying to climb our way to God. When we say we believe in God; go to church; do some nice things and good works; go to a certain church with the "right" theology it is as if we climb up some rungs closer to God.

On the other hand when we do some bad things, some sins, we may go back down a rung or two. Since we feel that we are pretty good and decent people; since we have done lots of good things; since we feel our "sins" with a small 's' aren't too bad especially when we compare ourselves with others (just look at all those corrupt sinners in our world); we rationalize that we must truly be on the upper part of this ladder.

Now as long as God is a fair God who grades on a curve (notice how our minds work) I will therefore certainly go to heaven when I die. I mean a C+ Christian should still receive a passing grade, shouldn't they? Since this is how an awful lot of people believe that God operates, then I really don't need to bother very much about my sins.

Yet this ladder theology, my friends, is not at all true; it is not Biblical in any way. The Bible rather teaches this truth that our real situation as human beings is that we are encompassed and filled with "Sin" with a capital 'S.'

The picture is one of a deep chasm or divide between us and God. Sin in other words separates and alienates us from God completely; there is no way we can climb or get to God on our own. We are not the good people and others are the sinners—we are all equal sinners in the eyes of God. There is no ladder to climb; there is no grading on the curve.

Jesus says in John 8:34, "*Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.*" In Psalm 51:5, King David prayed, "*Indeed I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.*" And the Apostle Paul says in Romans 3:23 that we "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

Sin, my friends, is not just some bad or naughty things we do once in awhile. Rather, it is part of our very nature. It is our condition from birth which if we don't bother with and deal with, will leave us condemned for all eternity. On our own (no matter how good we think we are in doing nice things) we are totally separated from God.

Therefore it is the result of our sinful nature, our "Sin," that we commit and do sins. Sins are not just little flaws in our personalities, things we can explain away in therapeutic language. They are not graded as to one being worse than another.

Yet the really scary truth is that our sins start in our sinful hearts, in our sinful minds, often long before (or even if) we ever put them into action. Jesus says that if we have lusted in our hearts for another we have already committed adultery with them; if we hate someone (seek revenge; post shameful Facebook posts; gossip) I have already killed them. Yes there are Christians (like ISIS terrorists) who are murdering people everyday...with their words. (Humorous story).

Therefore even if we don't do the action, our hearts and minds can still condemn us. That is why in one of our common confessions we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean; that we have sinned against God in thought, word and deed; by what we have done and by what we have left undone.

Yes, to not stand up for and correct the untruths about someone being gossiped about; to berate the poor and those of a different culture yet do nothing to help; to take a prideful attitude (like the Pharisees) that I am righteous and a great Christian even though I don't do anything positive to love my neighbor as I love myself—is sin.

This past week I read an article in *“Relevant Magazine”*--a Christian magazine seeking often to be a conscience to Christians and the church. The article is titled, *“Internet Outrage, Public Shaming And Modern Day Pharisees.”*

This article by Scott Sauls refers to *“New York Times writer Tim Kreider who coined, 'Outrage Porn,' to describe what he sees as our culture's insatiable desire for things to be offended by.”*

Kreider goes on to say *“that many contemporary people feed off of feeling 1) right and 2) wronged. 'Outrage Porn' resembles actual pornography in that it aims for a cheap, temporary thrill at the expense of another human being; but without any accountability or commitment to that human being.”*

Kreider continues that this *“often escalates into public shaming of groups of persons.”* He talks about many forms of online shaming like angry blogs, critical tweets, Facebook, emails. He says that *“under the posture of righteous indignation, the mob licks its chops as it goes after demonizing, diminishing and destroying its target.”*

Relevant Magazine writer Sauls lifts up the comparison to the *“holier than thou Pharisees”* who branded and shamed people; how righteous indignation (at societies ills) *“is just a mask for self-righteousness.”* He reminds us that every person is sacred; that we need to keep the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment (*you shall not bear false witness*) at the forefront.

My friends, this next year in a presidential election we are going to be bombarded with outrage porn; billionaires will spend hundreds of millions to shame and destroy anyone who stands in the way of their political intentions; politicians will say whatever even if it is not true.

Jesus commands us to stop the hate, to call a sin a sin. He calls us to put the best construction on others; to correct the lies, the innuendos, the shaming. Jesus calls us to get out from behind our computers, our TV's, our radios and do something to bring love, hope and peace to our world.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 7:15, *“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”* In verse 20 he says, *“Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.”* Finally in verse 24 he says, *“Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”*

The only hope for us and for this world in our sinful bodies of death is to attack this sin at its very core. That is what Jesus did for you and for me by dying on the cross. He didn't die there for just a few simple sins; rather he took our Sin; he took the Sin of the whole world on himself. He destroyed it and opened our way to be united with God.

The Apostle Paul says in Colossians 1:13-14, *“He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* Only through Jesus is there any hope and salvation for you and for me.

We live in a fallen and sinful world; we are totally lost. Therefore to solve the problems of our world, schools, families, communities, we dare not shame others as being the problem. Rather, we need to go to the core; to us and our nation who have lost our awareness of the power of sin.

We need to bring the judgment and the grace of Jesus to our world so that our own sinful nature might be put to death; so that we might repent and rely on Jesus as our only hope; so that we might be united with God and with each one whom God created; this is God's will for his world.

My friend, do you know this Jesus in your hearts by faith? Are you able to honestly look at your sinful nature and face up to the mirror of how you have failed? Are you willing to put to death your sinfulness through repentance and faith; to live in Jesus' forgiveness and new life?

SONG--"Jesus Friend of Sinners;" Please pray with me...