

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

EVANGELISTIC LESSONS

“The Destructive Nature of Sin”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

For a person to be saved, he first must understand the destructive nature of sin. How does the Bible define sin? What is the nature of sin? How does God describe it, and to what does He compare it? Why is sin so deadly to humans? These are some of the questions I would like to address from the Word of God as we consider the destructive nature of sin. As we think about sin, the Bible tells us what sin is. It tells us when we do sin and fall short of God’s will. So, from Scripture, what is sin?

We know first that sin is a transgression of God’s law. The text of 1 John 3:4 teaches us this very principle. Sin is a transgression of the law of God. When we go beyond what God tells us to do, or when we do not live up to His expectations, then we have transgressed His law. It is like a parent who tells a child to do something like cleaning his room, doing his homework, or returning to the house at a certain time of night. When that child fails to do those things, he has transgressed the law set down by his parents. The same is true with us. When God tells us to do something and sets forth laws in the Bible, and we fail to keep those laws, then we have transgressed the law of God. We need to understand that there is a law for Christians as God’s people today. James 1:25 describes the Word of God as “the perfect law of liberty.” So, yes, we today are under a system of law—the Word of God. We know that it is a law because on the Day of Judgment, we are going to be judged by the words of Christ. Jesus said in John 12:48, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” Thus, there is a law that we must obey—the Word of God. When we study it, know it, and do not keep God’s law, we have gone beyond what our God wants us to do and we have sinned.

A second way that sin could be described would be as “unrighteousness.” The text of 1 John 5:16-17 says that “all unrighteousness is sin.” The idea of righteousness is that of “right doing”—the keeping of God’s law and living correctly. When we live in an unrighteous way, then we are doing things that are not in accordance with the will of God. When God tells us to talk or act in a certain way, and we do the opposite of that, then we are viewed as unrighteous in God’s sight. Thus, whether it is our actions, our thoughts, things that we say, or things that we do, whenever we do the opposite of what is right and good, then we have sinned against God. God is a righteous Judge, and He is going to judge us according to the way that we live our lives in the here and now.

Third, we should recognize that sin is **knowing** what God wants us to do, **but not doing it**. James defined it this way in James 4:17—“To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” This is what we might refer to as a “sin of omission.” We knew what the right thing was to do, but we failed to act upon that knowledge. For example, maybe we know that it is the right thing to do to assemble with the saints. But we fail to do that so we can worship God. Maybe we know that it is right to study the Bible, but we fail to do that. Maybe we know that it is right to encourage those who need encouragement, but we fail to do that. When we fail to keep God’s law, then we have omitted to do things that are necessary for our salvation.

Thus, sin is a transgression of God's law. But it also is unrighteousness, as well as knowing what the right thing is to do, but failing to do it. As we think about the nature of sin, we need to inquire as to how sin is portrayed in the Bible. To what does God compare sin so that we can know exactly what it is?

First, sin is a defilement. The text of 2 Corinthians 7:1 teaches us that sin is a defilement of the body and of the spirit. To comprehend the idea of "defilement," think of a beautiful painting. Imagine taking a glass of red Kool-Aid and splashing it all over that painting. The painting has been defiled. It is no longer good for anything. It is not to be viewed in a beautiful way because it has been defiled. The Jew would naturally understand the concept of defilement. If you were to offer a Jew a plate of pork during the time of Jesus, that would be one of the worst types of defilement that they could imagine. The same is true in a sense for us today, except that sin is a defilement of our body and our spirit. When we do things that are wrong or that are contrary to God's will, then we have defiled our spirit. When we do things against our bodies (like ingesting beverage alcohol or doing drugs), we defile our bodies. When we fail to keep God's law, and when we do not live up to His standards, then we defile our spirit because it is no longer holy. It is defiled because it no longer has the pure character that it should have. The text of 1 Peter 1:15 teaches us, "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct." When we bring sin into our lives, we are no longer holy or pure. We have defiled ourselves.

The Bible also defines sin as a spot or a stain upon a beautiful garment. James 1:27 teaches us that we must keep ourselves unspotted from the world. James wrote: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." This presents the idea of sin being a spot or stain upon our garment. Isaiah 64:6 says that "all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags." Here is a vivid illustration as to how sin is like a stain or a spot. When my son was young, we brought him a beautiful white suit to wear to worship. It had rained the night before, and as he walked down the steps of our porch, he slipped and fell into a mud puddle. That beautiful suit that we had bought for him was stained with mud and dirt. That is a vivid illustration of how our spirit looks when we have sin in our lives. We ought to be pure, holy, and righteous before God. But when sin comes in, it stains our garments. Maybe you have gotten paint on your hands in the past, and you understand how hard it is to get it off. It stays on you, even though you wash and wash. But it still refuses to come off. That is what sin is like. It is like a stain or a spot on a beautiful garment. When we are baptized into the body of Christ, we have our sins washed away. We should be pure, holy, and righteous in God's sight. But when sin enters our lives, it stains the beautiful garment that we should possess.

We also need to know that sin is described in the Bible as a heavy burden that man cannot bear. Think about Psalm 38:4, where we find an accurate description of how sin is a heavy burden. The psalmist said, "My iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me." This idea of his sins or iniquities going over his head seems to present the idea that he is drowning in them and that they are crushing down on him so that the weight is unbearable. He thus said, "They are too heavy for me to bear." What is sin like? It is like drowning. It is like bearing a burden that you just cannot lift by yourself. Maybe you have lifted weights or tried to carry something, but you reached a "breaking point" where you simply could not lift or carry any more. That is what sin is like. It is something that man cannot bear by himself.

As we think about the nature of sin as described in the Bible, we also learn that God feels very strongly about sin. How does He feel about sin? Let's hear what God has to say about sin in the Bible. We need to understand that God does not take any pleasure in sin. By that,

we mean that He does not delight in it, He does not joke about it, and He does not laugh about sin. God takes sin very seriously because sin is an offense to Him. Think about Psalm 5:4, where we find an apt description of how God feels about sin. The psalmist wrote, "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You." God does not take pleasure in sin. He does not delight in it, and it is not joyful to Him. It is not something that He considers in a lighthearted way, or something that He uses to describe certain normal activities of life. That is not God's attitude toward sin. He is very serious about sin. We know that our Lord hated lawlessness. Hebrews 1:9 tells us this very principle. Jesus hated lawlessness. Jesus hated the absence of law or the inability to follow and keep God's commands. The Bible does not tell us about too many things that God and Jesus actually hate. But we need to know that both of them hate sin and iniquity. Why is that? Why do they hate sin? Jesus and God hate sin because of what it does to their creation. We are the creation of God. When God made the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1), He also made man in His own image (Gen. 1:27). God loves us so much that He wants us to go to Heaven. He loves us so much that He sent His Son to die on our behalf. Sin separates us from God. So we need to know that God feels very strongly about sin. We need to know that there is no acquittal for the wicked. Nahum 1:3 says that God will not acquit the wicked. If we live in sin and practice sin, then when we die and stand before the judgment bar of God, God is not going to say, "Well, I know that you didn't really mean to do it, and even though you are guilty, I'm still going to acquit you." Sometimes judges acquit people and presidents give pardons to people who really should be punished. There will be no acquittal from God for those who live in sin in this life. The only way we can have our sins nullified is by living true to Christ every day, by obeying the Gospel, and by being faithful to our Lord.

Here is the problem with sin. We all have to face it. Sin is a universal problem. Sin is not something that just a few people have to confront. Rather, sin is a universal problem that all men everywhere must confront. All people commit sin and unrighteousness. This is what the Scriptures clearly teach us. Sin is something that has afflicted every person who has ever lived. Think back to the wise words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:20 when he said, "There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin." All people do sin. Solomon indicated in Ecclesiastes 7:20-29 that even the most righteous people sin and fall short of God's will. I am reminded of the words of Paul in Romans 3:10. Paul said, "There is none righteous, no not one." He carried that farther when he said in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." As we think about the problem of sin, we need to know that sin does not originate with God. Sin originates from within mankind. James 1:14-15 says, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." Sin does not begin with God. Rather, it starts with our own lusts, desires, and actions. It starts within us. The sin problem lies solely with man. When we sin, we cannot look up to Heaven and blame God. We have only ourselves to blame with this problem. Romans 5:12 teaches us that "just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Death has come to all men because all men have sinned. It is not because Adam sinned, but because we have all chosen the path of sin. All men need the soul-saving message of Jesus so that they can have the hope of salvation.

Think with me now, not just about the problem of sin, but also about the penalty that accompanies sin. Sin is such a horrible problem because of the penalty that it carries. Sin brings death to man. This is one of the problems that man must face as a result of sin. Paul said in Ephesians 2:1, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Why were these people "dead"? It was because they had lived lives of sin. They had lived in rebellion to God, and as a result they needed the message of salvation. Romans 6:23

describes sin this way: “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Sin does bring death. The salary or paycheck of sin is death. But there is hope because of the free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. If we live in sin, we need to know that we will suffer a spiritual death. On the other side of this life, we are going to be lost for all eternity.

The penalty of sin also brings us separation from God. Sin separates humans from their God. Think about what Isaiah said in Isaiah 59:1-2. Isaiah wrote:

“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; no His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”

As we think about the penalty of sin, the worse thing that we can imagine is that sin separates us from God. God is on one side, and we are on the other. But the two need to be together. Sin, however, has severed that relationship. When we think about the horrible consequences of sin, one of the worst of those is that sin causes man not to be in a right relationship with God. Imagine what a tragedy that is. God is depicted as a God of love, a God of compassion, and a God of comfort Who wants to bless us and bring us home to Heaven. Yet sin causes us to be lost and to be without hope. It causes us to be severed from our God. The penalty of sin is the sacrifice of Jesus. Sin sent Jesus to the cross. Isaiah 53:5 says, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” Why did Jesus have to suffer and take upon Himself the penalty for our sins? It was because He was the atoning sacrifice. He alone lived a perfect life. Sin is such a horrible thing because it sent Jesus, our Lord and Savior, to the cross. Peter must have had Isaiah 53:4-5 in mind when he wrote in 1 Peter 2:24, “He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” Sin brings with it a great penalty. But Jesus went to the cross and bore that penalty for each one of us. The text of 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” When Jesus cried out in Matthew 27:46, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?,” the answer we find is that it was because of our sins. Jesus was separated from God as a result of our sins. We therefore must realize that sin does carry with it a very heavy penalty.

One of the worst penalties of sin is that a person can be lost in Hell forever if he remains in sin. It is a sad thing to think about a person being lost in Hell. But that is exactly what the Bible says will happen to those who do not obey the Gospel. Jesus described Hell in Mark 9:44 when He said that it is a place “where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’” Think about Luke 16:19-31. The rich man wanted just a single drop of water to cool his tongue because he acknowledged that he was in torment. The Book of Revelation describes the horror of Hell as a “lake of fire.” In the Gospel accounts, Hell is depicted as a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth—a horrible place where no one would ever want to go. But we need to know that if we live a life of sin, we **will** live in Hell for eternity. God does not want that, and we should not want that. This lesson is geared toward helping people understand what sin is about so that they can overcome the destructive nature of sin.

As we think about the nature of sin and its penalty, we also need to realize that there is a cure for sin. Here is the good news of the Gospel. Yes, if a person lives in sin, he or she will spend eternity with the devil. But no one **has** to live in sin because there **is** a cure for the sin problem. Jesus Himself is that cure. In Matthew 26:28, Jesus said, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Jesus offered His blood as an atoning sacrifice—a sacrifice “shed for many” so that sins could be forgiven.

Hebrews 10:12 describes Jesus as the “once-for-all” sacrifice. “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.” Hebrews 2:9 says that Jesus “tasted death for everyone.” He died so that we would not have to. He became a sacrifice so that we would not have to bear the guilt of our own sins. The text of 1 John 2:1-2 teaches us that He is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” I love the words of Romans 5:8—“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus loved us so much that while we were steeped in sin and dying in its muck and mire, He provided us a way to avoid having to bear the guilt of that sin. We need to know that Jesus is the only way to salvation. In John 14:6, Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Jesus is the only way, the only path, to God. We cannot get to God without going through Christ. It is essential that if we are going to be saved, we must hear the words of Jesus and obey the plan of salvation. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” The person who will be saved is the person who does Christ’s will. What is the cure for sin today? How do we overcome a life of sin?

A person must be willing to obey the Gospel. He must understand the nature of sin, and must realize that if he remains in sin, he will be lost. And, yes, that person must obey the plan of salvation. In Acts 16:30, the question is asked by the Philippian jailer, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” As we think about the nature of sin, we need to realize that we do not have to live in sin any longer. Jesus made the sacrifice for sin, and if we are willing to obey His will, we can be saved. We must understand that Jesus is that sacrifice, and we must place our trust in Him. The Bible sets forth the plan of salvation for us in the New Testament. As we learn from reading the New Testament, there are five steps in the plan of salvation.

First, one must hear the Word of God. The Bible says in Romans 10:17, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” When we think about hearing the Word of God, we need to know that this means to be attentive to God’s voice so that we can see what God has to say on the matter of salvation, so that we can realize that He is the only One Who can save us, and so that we can put our trust in His Word to save us. Paul said in Romans 1:16 that it is the Gospel that has the power to save mankind. We are told to “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jas. 1:21). To be saved, we must come to the Bible and respect it as the only authority on salvation. We must trust what it has to say.

Second, once we have heard the words of God, then we must be willing to believe that Jesus is the Son of God—the Savior of the world. As we think about belief, I am reminded of the example found in Acts 8. Philip and the Ethiopian nobleman are going down the road, and the nobleman asks, “Here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (vs. 36). Philip then responded, “If you believe with all your heart, you may” (vs. 37). Thus, one must believe in Jesus as God’s Son.

Third, we not only have to believe in Jesus, but we also have to turn from a life of sin to a life of righteousness. We turn **from** sin **to** God. This is known in the Bible as repentance. In Acts 3:19, Peter preached that we must “repent, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.” In Luke 13:1-5, certain people were coming to Jesus to ask Him about folks who had something bad happen to them. Some had a tower fall on them. So the people asked Jesus if they were worse sinners than all others. Jesus said in Luke 13:3, “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

Thus, if a person hears God's Word, believes in Jesus as Savior, and repents of past sin in his life, fourth, he must be willing to confess Jesus as the Son of God. When we think about confession, we need to be reminded of the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:32-33. Jesus said, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." Paul said in Romans 10:10, "With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Fifth, a person must be willing to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. As we think about baptism, we need to examine what Peter preached in Acts 2 in response to the question, "What must we do?" (vs. 37). Peter responded by saying, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (vs. 38). We must be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins if we want to be rid of the sin problem in our lives.

We are praying for you, so that if you have sin in our life you will make it right. We hope you will realize the destructive nature of sin, and place your trust in Jesus as the only way to be saved from a life of sin.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE DESTRUCTIVE NATURE OF SIN”

1. According to 1 John 3:4, what is sin?
2. James 1:25 teaches us today that we are to live by a certain law. What is that law?
3. What, according to John 12:48, will judge us in eternity?
4. How does 1 John 5:16-17 define sin?
5. In James 4:17, James also offers a definition of sin. What is that definition?
6. The text of 2 Corinthians 7:1 teaches us that sin is a defilement of the body and of the spirit. What is meant by the term “defilement”?
7. When we sin, how does it affect our embodiment of the teaching of 1 Peter 1:15?
8. Explain the statement in Isaiah 64:6 that “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.”
9. According to Psalm 38:4, what does our sin become to us?
10. What, according to Psalm 5:4, is God’s attitude toward sin?
11. According to Hebrews 1:9, God loves something and hates something else. What are the things that God loves and hates?
12. What does Ecclesiastes 7:20-29 teach us?
13. James 1:14-15 explains that when people sin, that sin brings forth something. What is that “something”?
14. According to Romans 5:12, death comes upon all men. Why?
15. Nahum 1:3 teaches us something that God will **not** do. What is it?
16. In Ephesians 2:1, Paul described some people as “dead.” Why were they dead?
17. What, according to Isaiah 59:1-2, does sin do to our relationship with God?
18. Isaiah 53:5 says, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” Who is the “He” of this passage?
19. The text of 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Who is the “Him” of this passage?
20. According to Matthew 26:28, what did Jesus do that relieves humankind of its sin problem?