

"Sin: Part 1"

Romans 3:23

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Introduction:

This morning I would invite you to look with me at a very brief passage from the Scriptures concerning something that nearly all of us have in common. The passage is found in the book of **Romans—Romans 3:23**. In our pew Bibles, the Scripture is found on **page 1762**. We live in a land, and we are part of a congregation, where we have come from many backgrounds—our ancestors have come from all over the world. We come from all different economic backgrounds. Some of us speak different languages, but the Bible says that there is at least one thing that nearly all of us have in common, because in **Romans 3:23**, the apostle Paul says, “...***for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***” **▶▶PPT▶▶** We know from the Bible, therefore, that sin is something that nearly all of us have in common, and it goes back almost to the very beginning of time. I say that “**nearly**” all of us have sinned, because some here this morning are not old enough to have sinned. Sin is something we do when we are old enough to know better. But for those of us in that category, for those of us who have lived to the point where we are accountable to God, the Bible teaches that all of us have sinned.

And the price of sin is enormous. Just a few chapters, later, in **Romans 6:23**, Paul will go on to say that, “...***the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***” And so we find that the payment for sin is death. We put these two verses together, and we quickly discover that all of us deserve to die for what we have done. And yet in spite of this truth from the Bible, many people still do not understand what sin really is. In fact, every effort is made to cover it up and explain it away. We live in a society that is increasingly reluctant to even use the word “**sin.**” Many people live in ignorance, not knowing what sin is, and certainly not understanding the price that must ultimately be paid for it.

This morning, then, I would like for us to go back to the Scriptures and I'd like for us to rediscover what the Bible teaches on the subject of sin. Most of you know that I normally like going to one paragraph of Scripture and sticking there for the whole lesson. Unfortunately, we will not be able to do that this morning. Our subject is broad, there are many Scriptures to consider, and so I would like for us to break our lesson into two parts. This morning we will consider what sin really is, we will study the nature of sin, we will consider the consequences of sin, and then next Sunday, Lord willing, we will consider various ways of dealing with sin. In our lesson, since there will be a number of Scriptures, I have tried to put most of the references on the

wall. I would challenge you to beat me to them. As the old saying goes, **“The sound of turning pages is music to a preacher’s ears.”**

I. This morning, though, let us consider WHAT SIN REALLY IS. »PPT»

I mean, the word **“sin”** is a weird little word! Of course, we are talking about an English word. We could look in an English dictionary, but the Bible was not written in English. So we go back and we find two words that are used more than any others that are translated by what we commonly refer to as **“sin.”**

A. The first word translates what we might refer to as CROSSING THE LINE. »PPT»

Perhaps a little closer to the original meaning would be the English word **“transgression,”** literally meaning, **“to step across.”** When we transgress, we step across a line that God has told us not to cross. It refers to crossing over or bypassing one of God’s commandments. We think back, for example, to the very first sin ever committed. We think back to the Garden of Eden. God put Adam and Eve in a perfect situation, He gave them freedom of choice, and then the Lord basically gave them one thing not to do—one commandment (in **Genesis 2:16-17**), **“From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”** And yet we know what happened next. Satan deceived the woman, Eve ate from the tree, she gave it to her husband, and the New Testament says in **1 Timothy 2:14** that the woman, **“...fell into transgression,”** because at that point Eve had crossed the line. And so we find that sin is a lot more than simply eating a piece of fruit, but sin is when we step across a line that God has told us not to cross. Adam and Eve decided they knew more about what was best for them than God did. They made their own rules, and so they crossed the line. That is what sin is—it is crossing the line. Sin is transgressing God’s law.

Several years ago I told you about a situation where I had personally become a transgressor—not a transgressor of God’s law, but a transgressor of the laws of the City of Madison. We had just moved here, we had just moved into a brand new house, the yard was a pile of dirt, but in my passion to make it look better, I did some research concerning trees that I could plant on the terrace—that little strip of dirt between the sidewalk and the street. Well, I discovered that most homes in our area had purple mountain ash trees planted on the terrace, so we went out and bought four Purple Mountain Ash trees. We planted them in the terrace and kept them watered. They were healthy little trees. Well, the following spring I got a letter from the tree police—the Forestry Section of the Madison Parks Division, **“I noted that four young trees are planted in the street right-of-way in front of your address. The City of Madison has tree ordinances regarding this type of planting and I have enclosed a copy of them with this letter. Our policy is that we give the property owner first chance to transplant or remove these trees. If the trees are not removed by April 1, 2001, Forestry employees will remove them for you [and send you the bill].”** And then the nice man enclosed

a copy of the actual law, under the heading, **“Offenses Against Public Property,”** **“No...tree shall be planted in any of the public streets of the City of Madison until such tree and the place where it is to be planted shall first have been approved by the Board of Park Commissioners, and a permit granted by said Board therefor.”** And so within just a few months of moving to Madison, I had offended the tree gods. I had become, literally, a **“public offender.”** I had crossed the line. Well, we dug up the trees. We gave two to our neighbors to plant in their backyard and two to a member of this congregation, and as far as I know it, those trees are still happy and healthy to this day. By the way, the city then came by and planted two of their own Purple Mountain Ash trees—for which they also sent us the bill...which was about six times what I had paid for my little trees! Nevertheless, I had crossed the line. I did not know it at the time, but I had inadvertently stepped across a line that had been drawn by the city.

B. There is a second word that we often translate as “sin” in our English Bibles, and it is a word that literally refers to MISSING THE MARK.
»PPT»

As I understand it, this word is used more than 300 times in the New Testament, more than three times more than any other word for sin. The word refers to the idea that we are aiming for a target, perhaps we are aiming for God’s perfection, we may be trying to do the right thing, and yet in spite of our best efforts, something happens and we miss the target. Perhaps some of you will remember what happened during the summer Olympics back in August 2004. American Matt Emmons was doing extremely well in the 50-meter three-position rifle final—so well, in fact, that in order to win the gold medal he only needed an average shot, something just kind of close to the bull’s eye. And so on his final shot he calmed himself down, he aimed, he fired, and he hit the bull’s eye dead on. He ended up in eighth place. He lost the gold medal because on that final round he was aiming at the wrong target! He had accidentally aimed at the target in lane three while he was actually in lane two. He missed the mark. That is the meaning of the most common word for sin in the New Testament.

The word is used in our passage for this morning, in **Romans 3:23**, **“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** We are aiming for the glory of God. We are shooting for perfection. And yet due to human weakness we miss it—we fall short—we miss the target. Missing the mark is to fail to reach the standard that God has set.

The standard has been revealed for us in the New Testament—starting in the book of **Matthew** and ending with the book of **Revelation**. For some, this is a difficult statement. Several years ago, we had to withdraw our fellowship from a man who insisted that the Law of Christ is not a standard for the world today, but that the world is still subject to certain aspects of the Law of Moses. And yet Jesus Himself said in **John 12:48**, **“He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”** We are not judged by the words of Moses, but we are judged by the words of Christ. In other words, we look at the words of Christ, and if we fail to measure up,

then we have missed the mark. The Law of Moses said, ***"You shall not commit adultery"*** (Exodus 20:14). But Jesus went even beyond that and said that, ***"...everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart"*** (Matthew 5:28). The words of Christ are holding the world today to a higher standard than the Law of Moses ever did, and if we fall short in any way then we are guilty before the Lord. And, as the Lord said in Matthew 5:32, we will then be, ***"...guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."***

So far, we have been talking about doing what God has told us not to do. On the flipside, I should also point out that it is also possible to sin by NOT doing what God has told us TO do. In James 4:17, for example, the Bible says, ***"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."*** If we fail to do what we know is right, then we have also missed the mark. Sin, therefore, is stepping across a line that God has told us not to cross, and sin also refers to missing the mark.

II. Now that we have looked at some basic definitions, we need to consider THE NATURE OF SIN—WHAT IS SIN LIKE? »PPT»

A. From our own personal experience, and also from the Scriptures, we know, first of all, that SIN IS PLEASURABLE. »PPT»

It feels good! Otherwise, why are there so many sinners? We know that sinning is not like going to the dentist! We go to the dentist, and we feel pain—we want the gas, we want the needle, but we don't even want the needle without the gel that goes on first. Getting our teeth drilled hurts. But sin isn't like that. Sin doesn't hurt—it feels good! We think of Moses in the book of Hebrews, in Hebrews 11:24-26, the Bible says that, ***"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward."*** And so it's in the Bible—the Bible says that sin is pleasurable! But notice that the Bible refers to the ***"passing pleasures of sin."*** The pleasures of sin are ***"passing."*** The pleasure is only temporary. We think of the prodigal son who got his inheritance early and ***"...gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living"*** (Luke 15:13). That must have felt so good—the food, the parties, the drinking—all of it. Sin, therefore, brings pleasure. The pleasure is only temporary, but there is definitely pleasure involved—otherwise, we wouldn't do it!

B. We also know from the Scriptures as well as our own personal experience, that SIN IS DECEITFUL. »PPT»

Like the kid who finds a baby raccoon and wants to keep it as a pet, sin may start out looking cute, but the true colors only come out over time. We think we can control it—just a little immorality here and there—we will just do this here and there, just up

to the point where we see that something bad is about to happen, but sin is deceitful. The process is described in James 1:14-16, *“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”* We would do well to heed the words of Hebrews 3:12-13, *“Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*

C. We should also consider from the Scriptures that SIN IS PROGRESSIVE.

»PPT»

That is, it tends to grow on us—it gets worse over time. The old saying is true, **“Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.”** As the apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:13, *“But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”* Sin has a tendency to take us from bad to worse. For an example, perhaps we can think about King David in the Old Testament. There was a time in David’s life when he never would have thought about taking another man’s wife and then covering it up with murder. But it all came at the end of a long progression, a long series of other sins. He started by ignoring God’s plan for marriage—marrying many women. He went on to commit what some would see as the **“small sin”** of lust, which led to the **“big sin”** of adultery, which then led to a cover-up involving lying and murder. Sin is progressive.

And so it has been said that sin never dies on its own. In other words, if we do not pull it out like a weed, if we do not destroy it, then it tends to take over. It changes the way we think. We start to justify our behavior. The difference between right and wrong gets a little fuzzy. Sometimes we even start to go looking for Scriptures to support our behavior, or maybe we hear someone say, “The Spirit is leading me to do this or that,” something that is not even in the Bible—and eventually we may even get to the point of being **“sermon-proof,”** that is, we stop responding even to the word of God. Sin is progressive.

III. Before we end this morning, I would like for us to consider at least an overview of what this really means for us. In other words, WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN? We have looked at what sin is, we have looked at the nature of sin, but now let us at least briefly consider the CONSEQUENCES. What does all of this really mean? »PPT»

Sometimes we do not really appreciate how expensive something is until we put it in terms we can understand. For example, we complain about the high cost of gas. Gas right now is around \$2.50 a gallon. But think about a bottle of Lipton Iced Tea from PDQ—16 ounces at \$1.19 works out to \$9.52 a gallon. Or maybe a 12 ounce coffee at Culvers for \$1.29—that works out to \$13.75 a gallon. We compare that to Vicks Nyquil—6 ounces at \$8.35 works out to more than \$178 per gallon. Or, an HP

#2 Black Ink Cartridge—16ml for \$18 works out to more than \$4,294 per gallon. In the same way, sin is a lot more expensive than we may think, so for a few minutes let us consider the consequences.

A. One of the first results of sin is that it ENSLAVES. »PPT»

Perhaps when we think of slavery, we think about the ancient Egyptians and the slaves that built the pyramids, or maybe the countless thousands who came to America in chains—picking cotton, and so on. And as horrible as those images are, Jesus used a similar picture in John 8:34, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.”* Or, as Paul said in Romans 6:16, *“Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?”* The apostle Peter used similar words when referring to false teachers in 2 Peter 2:19, *“...promising...freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.”*

B. Not only does sin enslave, but we also find in the Bible that sin CONTAMINATES. »PPT»

Sin makes us dirty. We live in a society that values cleanliness. We hate going into a restaurant and finding dried chunks of food at the bottom of our coffee cup. Several days ago I was stirring some sugar into my coffee, and my spoon kept catching on something at the bottom of the cup—not cool! We want clean dishes, clean air, clean parks, clean streets.

The Bible teaches that our souls start out clean, but that we get contaminated when we sin. Even as Christians, it is a constant struggle. In James 1:27, the Lord’s half-brother said that, *“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”* As Christians, we are passing through a very dirty world, and it is a struggle to keep clean. Last week, we toured an iron mine up near Iron Mountain, Michigan. Somebody in our family made the mistake of wearing white pants—white pants in an iron mine—not a good combination. In the same way, sin rubs off on us—sin stains. And James says that we can keep ourselves from getting stained by taking care of the widows and orphans in their distress. Sin, therefore, is described in the Bible as causing stains—sin will make us dirty.

C. We also discover from the Scriptures that SIN CREATES SORROW, AND TRAGEDY, AND EVEN SCARS. »PPT»

If we could only look ahead and see the consequences, certainly we would sin less than we do. We know from personal experience that drugs and alcohol destroy families—lives are torn apart. We know from personal experience that adultery also destroys families and causes untold suffering for the spouse and any children who may be left behind—scars that will last for a lifetime. We think about the statistics on

divorce, and the effect that divorce has on the children—results that will continue for generations.

But too often we fail to see what's coming. Perhaps you remember the story out of Florida several years ago where three young people had a few beers and drove around stealing street signs to decorate their mobile home. Just a few hours later, a Mack truck smashed into a car at an intersection missing its stop sign, killing three people. Those who stole the signs were caught and were sentenced to 15 years in prison—surely the prison sentence is nothing compared to the emotional trauma, the scars that those three young adults will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

In the Bible, we think of Peter who promised the Lord that he would never turn away. The Lord said to Peter in **Matthew 26:34**, *"Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."* And Peter said to Him, *"Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You."* And we know the rest of that story. Peter got caught up in the moment, he denied the Lord three times that very night...and then he heard the rooster. You know that from then on whenever Peter heard a rooster, he had to think back to that night! Oh, the scars that are caused by sin!

D. But even beyond the slavery, the contamination, the sorrow, the most tragic consequence of sin is the SEPARATION THAT IT CAUSES—SEPARATION BETWEEN GOD AND THE ONE WHO SINS. We refer to it as being LOST. »PPT»

In **Isaiah 59:2**, the Bible says that, *"...your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."* What many people do not realize is that all sin is ultimately a personal offense to God. As our Creator, He gave us freedom of choice. Sin is choosing the wrong way. Even after everything he had done, King David sang out to God in **Psalms 51:4** and said, *"Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge."* King David understood that he had offended God.

Sin is like a giant canyon—we are on one side and God is on the other. Sin is like the break in a circuit. Our old car had a break in one of the rear defroster lines, so the ice would never break over that one wire—the power never made it through. Sin is like the break in that wire—we are on one side and God is on the other, and all it takes is one little gap. One sin is all it takes to put us in a lost condition. One sin has the power to keep us out of heaven.

It has been said that it only takes one disease to kill a man, and that is so true! You do not have to have heart disease, cancer, pneumonia, diabetes, and kidney failure to die, but any one of those in an advanced stage can bring a person's life to an end. One disease is all it takes, and it is the same way with sin. It only takes one sin for any one of us to die spiritually. It only takes one sin to break our relationship with God. It's almost like asking, **"Which gun is more deadly at close range: A .357 magnum or a 12 gauge shotgun?"** Well, both of those are deadly! Either one can

end a life. In the same way, one lie can break that circuit with God. One affair, one moment of drunkenness, one outburst of anger, one moment of greed. One sin opens up that canyon between us and God. You might remember when Jesus was talking with a rich young ruler. And although the man was very religious, Jesus could see that he was in love with his possessions, and so the Lord said in **Matthew 19:21**, ***"If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."*** The Bible says that, ***"...when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property."*** This man had been faithful to God from youth, but this one sin—the sin of greed—this one sin was enough to keep him out of heaven.

Conclusion:

This morning we have just started to consider the subject of sin. Hopefully we can get back to it next week as we learn more concerning what we can do about it. But for now, when we commit sin, the most important thing is what we do next. We think about Judas who betrayed the Lord. The Bible says that he ***"felt remorse"*** (**Matthew 27:3**), but then he went out and hanged himself (**verse 5**). Just a few moments ago, we also looked at the sin of Peter—a sin that happened the same night. The Bible says (in **Matthew 26:75**) that Peter went out and ***"wept bitterly."*** Peter and Judas were both sorry for what they had done, but Peter was restored. Judas took his own life, but Peter made things right with God. And so when we commit a sin, the most important thing is what we do next. If we lose our temper and lash out and say something cruel to a member of the family, what do we do next? If we mistreat a coworker, what do we do next? If we find ourselves thinking evil thoughts, what do we do next?

As Christians, we are to turn away from those sins, we work it out, we confess it to the Lord, and we move on. If we need to, we reach out for help. We take it to the church. We go to God in prayer. But for those who are not yet Christians, the Bible teaches that we must believe in God, that we must change our sinful behavior, that we must confess the name of Christ as being the Son of God, and that we then allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Christ died to close the circuit. Christ died to bridge that canyon. If you have any questions, please ask and we would be glad to meet and discuss it. If you have sinned, the most important thing is what you do next. If you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org