

## KILLING SIN – PART 1: THE ENEMY WITHIN

Ferndale Baptist Church – May 2015

Welcome/Intro – Thank you for the privilege of being here again. It was a joy to give a good report to my church & elders. It is a joy to be here and soak up the Word of God with you.

So over the next couple of days, we'll be talking about KILLING SIN. Fun, right? Pastor Jon thought so.

We'll be talking about how a deepening reliance on the Gospel will make us more aware of “the sin that so easily entangles” and thus more aware of our need for Jesus. **Seeing the depths of what we have been saved from will glorify Jesus and draw us closer to Him as He walks with us through the process of sanctification.**

**Romans 8:12-13:** *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

John Owen, puritan pastor & author, wrote in his book *The Mortification of Sin* – “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”

As Christian people, we ought to know that sin is real. It is deadly. We need to keep a deep sense of that reality. Sin kills, sin numbs, sin destroys – and does so while telling us “I’m not here” - sin by it’s nature is deceit (Heb. 3:13)

- You would never put a snake in your bedroom... then convince yourself it’s not really there.
- It is sin that played no small part in our calling to Christ, in our captivation by the Gospel
- (for you cannot understand the Gospel unless you understand sin).

My wife and I have been married almost 12 years. Like many of you who are married, we have had our ups & downs with the joys and trials of married life - **But about 2 years into our marriage, we hit a particularly rough spot.** We were dealing with a series of events that included my wife suffering from chronic depression and experiencing an intensely difficult pregnancy with our first child as she suffered from hyperemesis (constant nausea/sickness). Her physical/mental condition, coupled with my anger over the broken expectation that this should be one of the most joyful times in our life, turned out to be a volatile combination. We experienced a growing frustration with our situation that as days passed, we began to take out on each other. I found myself saying things and treating her in such ways that that I never would have imagined when I stood at the altar and said “I do” - It was a dark season in our marriage.

Though these trials were circumstantial, the situation peeled back the veneer of our hearts and allowed each of us to see areas of sin beneath the surface that, quite frankly, shocked us. We realized later that what we had essentially done was allow many small sins in our lives to go unchecked. These weren't "big" obvious sins, but a many small things that were done, said, thought - or not done, not said, or not thought. Each of these "peccadilloes" was like a small brick, and over the span of the next 18 months or so, we would lay these little bricks, one by one upon the other. One here. One there. Little comments made. Little affections withheld. Little suspicions, mistrusts. Harsh words. Little lies we would believe about each other and about God. Subtle ways where we would blame each other for hard times, and shift that blame to the God that we love.

No matter how slowly or how quickly you stack bricks on each other, you eventually end up with - what? Walls.

**All these little subtle sins against each other and against Christ accumulated into something much larger** - we were married and living together and starting a family, but there was no joy in our relationship during that season. All those little sins stacked together killed our joy in each other and our joy in the Lord.

How often does this play out in your relationships? **How often does this also play out in that relationship which should take precedence over all others?** How often - over weeks, months, years - to do we stack up small sins, little bricks that put a wall between us and God?

**Sin, when left unchecked, will over time, add up and kill the joy not only in our relationships with each other, but in our relationship with God.** Little bricks build big walls.

**"Be killing sin or sin will be killing you."**

**WHAT IS SIN?** I find it helpful to draw a contrast:

When God made the earth, He said "It is good."

"Shalom" – Hebrew word meaning perfection, wholeness, peace - it is the standard of God

- Indicates that all is well, as it should be, as it was meant to be, and this is how it was in the beginning - no deceit, war, disease, pain

**Sin - in very general terms - is everything not "shalom". Any action, thought, attitude, motive that breaks or rebels against the perfect standard of God - this is sin or the effects of sin.** It could be internal or external

Scripture refers to sin under multiple names, images, and analogies:

- Rebellion, folly, self-abuse, deception, madness, treason, death, hatred, spiritual adultery, missing the mark, wandering from the path, insanity, irrationality, pride, selfishness, blindness, deafness, hard-heartedness, delusion, stiff-necked, self-worship, idolatry
- Sin falls into categories of OMISSION & COMMISSION
  - **Commission** – when we do what we should not do
    - sins we commit, act upon, do willfully
  - **Omission** - when we do not do that we should do
    - James 4:17 - *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*
    - sins of neglect, apathy, laziness
- **Sin is much more than just wrong actions or bad behavior** - it is NOT PASSIVE - it is an active, driving moral force in our heart, our inner being, directing thoughts, motives, intentions. It is not “doing sin” that makes us sinners, rather we commit sins because **SIN IS INGRAINED INTO OUR VERY NATURE**
  - Contrary to the popular view many hold to today , no one is born as a “good person” or as a blank slate. (For those who hold to this view, I can only assume they’ve had no interaction with small children.)
    - *My kids, at ~two years old, began to test boundaries - I did not need to teach them to rebel against me. (EX - driveway)*
    - Scripture gives clear support:
      - Psalm 51:5 - Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
      - Psalm 58:3 - Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies.
  - Eph 2 - As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Augustine & Lewis - **Sin is a disordering of love.** Because of sin, we misidentify and mis-order what will bring us joy. A paraphrase of AUGUSTINE (from *Doctrine*): “We either love what we ought not love, or fail to love what we ought to love, or love more what we should love less, or love less what we should love more.”

- Sin is giving yourself to anyone or anything other than Jesus; it is the disordering of you your love Him and placing it upon something or someone else

**Sin is more than wrong actions – it is a driving principle or moral force ingrained in our hearts, the core of our being.**

- The actions are merely ripples on the surface of an immense ocean.
- Paul refers to this principal as “the flesh”, he personifies it – it’s not just this “force” that waits around - it is actively seeking to kill you off. Listen to his language as he describes sin:
  - o Rom 7:8-11 - *But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.*
  - o Gal. 5:17 - *For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*

**Sin, therefore, is not an addendum to our humanity.** Sin is not a sickness like the flu or a cold - it is hardwired in who we are, it is knit within our spiritual DNA. **Our nature - apart from Christ - is to sin.**

**Total Depravity** – 1<sup>st</sup> point of Calvinistic system of theology

- Simply says that all of our nature and character is marred, broken by sin
- MIND – we do not think the thoughts of God, and our intellect is skewed – we think wrongly
  - o “I can’t understand the bible when I study” – it’s not that the Bible is unclear – it’s that our minds are broken
  - o If you are a brain, a thinker – realize you can’t always trust your analysis & reasoning
- EMOTIONS – not always right;
  - o If you tend to be emotive, “feels right” you need to learn to doubt to some degree your emotions
- WILL (driven by mind/emotions) – what you want and choose to do
- The TOTALITY of our person is affected, tainted by sin
- TOTAL is in reference to scope, not necessarily the expression or depth of committed sin – we are not as bad as we could be (you could sin more)
  - o We are still image-bearers of God
  - o Romans 2 says we still have conscience that bears witness to God’s law
  - o But all of who we are is affected by sin

**We must understand that sin is very real and it is a very big deal.**

We must keep & cultivate a deep sense of that reality because sin is not *primarily* about us. **The reason sin is a big deal is that above all, sin disrupts, resists and rebels against the vital human relation to God.** It obscures the glory of God and detracts us from worship. Sin destroys/violates/resists/perverts “shalom” - God’s established standard - and thus separates us from the God we were created to know, love, serve & worship.

We could go on and on. We could get very specific. But even at a high level like this, it’s clear that sin is a huge deal - Sin kills, sin numbs, sin destroys – but it does so while telling us “I’m not here” - DECEIT.

Yet, in the vocabulary of our society the very word “sin” – is all but gone.

- Consider this excerpt from Jerry Bridge’s *Respectable Sins* (pp 18-19)

We must be careful not to dismiss sin as something only outside of the church.

- Many have essentially REDEFINED sin to refer only to the blatant sins of outside society.
- ALL SIN IS SIN, not just the big, ugly blatant ones.
- Our religious pride, our criticism of those around us, harsh speech, deaf ears, impatience, laziness, anger, discontentment, jealousy, unthankfulness, boredom, despair, anxiety – it is all deadly serious in the sight of God – so it should be in our sight as well

(TURN TO ROM. 8) **There are plenty of examples, but I’m thinking of one particular man in the Bible who knew quite intimately the nature of sin.** We would have likely labeled him today a terrorist if he were alive today - he had dedicated much of his life to persecuting Christians - even killing them. He later gave his life to the service of Jesus and God used him (among other things) to write most of the New Testament. We know him as the apostle Paul. This is a man who is personally well acquainted with sin.

**Consider Paul’s words from Romans 8:12-13: *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.***”

What is he saying? “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”

- *OTHER EXAMPLES: 1 Peter 2:24, “He bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). \* Romans 6:6, 2, “We have been united with him in a death like his. . . . Our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing. . . . How can we who died to sin still live in it?” Gal 2:20; 5:24, “I have been crucified with Christ. . . . Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Rom 7:4, “You have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another.”*

- Or Paul's words from Colossians 3:5-6 – **“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming.”** (Colossians 3:2-6 ESV)

Another warning - **“Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”**

**\*\*Who is Paul speaking to?** Churches. “Brothers” - those of you for whom Christ is your life! **Don't miss this - Paul is addressing believers here! Wait - Do Christians sin?** Can I be a true follower of Christ and still sin? And if we do, how do we deal with it?

**If you have accepted Christ by faith as Lord and Savior** - the Spirit of God lives in you, your heart has been made new and you have been freed from the absolute dominion of sin.

**Yet the principle of sin - or as Paul calls it, the law of sin & death - still lurks within us and is constantly at war with the Holy Spirit.**

But we know both from Scripture (and from honest assessment of our daily lives) that sin is still a force very much active within us. **There's a tension here - and a NARRATIVE TENSION throughout scripture.** Hebrews 10:14 captures it very well:

**For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14 ESV)** (*sanctification* - the process of being made holy, of being perfected)

- God *has perfected* those who *are being perfected*.
- It is as if God says, “I have already finished what I am now doing.”

Here Scripture shows us our two sides held in tension to being in Christ:

- **“HAS PERFECTED”** - When we initially trust Christ and Him alone for the forgiveness of our sins, we turn from sin and are covered with the righteousness of Christ (a right-ness that meets God's perfect standards). At the 1st moment we put our faith in Jesus, we were covered in Him and instantly made holy, made so that our sins no longer count against us and separate us from God. This happens not because we are so great, but b/c Christ is.
  - We call this *justification* - absolved of guilt! we who were once “children of wrath” become adopted sons & daughters through faith in Jesus.
  - That is a secure, final, finished, ultimate work accomplished by Jesus

- **“ARE BEING PERFECTED”** - But while justification dealt with the sin that separated us from God, it does not instantaneously remove us from what Paul calls “the body of death” (Rom. 7:24) or “the flesh”
  - Following salvation, we continue to struggle with sin - but now we do so as those able to fight it.
  - This is why Paul says in 1 Cor. 9 “I do not fight as one beating the air - but I discipline my body (*the flesh*) and keep it under control.”
  - So in addition to perfecting us with the righteousness of Christ, God continues to make us holy by growing us each day to be more like Jesus. We call this *sanctification* - the process of being made holy.

**That is the tension - Though the “old self” is defeated in the ultimate sense, and it no longer has absolute reign within us, it is still very much active within us and will be until the end of our earthly days.**

- Like a cockroach when you spray it with bug killer - it goes crazy, thrashes around. Eventually it dies.
- Though our sin is forgiven, it does not relegate itself passively in a corner and wait for us to enter glory with Christ - rather, it goes crazy, thrashes about and actively seeks its destructive desires over those of the Spirit of God

The apostle Paul clearly felt this tension and it comes through in his writings. **In fact, as time goes on and Paul grows in his relationship with Christ, the more aware of his sin he seems to become.**

- For example, in **1 Cor. 15:9** (written around AD 55), he refers to himself as “the least of the apostles”
- About 5 years later, he writes to the Ephesian church and refers to himself at **“the very least of all the saints” (Eph. 3:8)**
- 3-4 years after that, he writes the letter we know as **1 Timothy** and refers to himself *in the present tense* as the “foremost” or the “chief” of all sinners (1 Tim. 1:15)

**As Paul walks with Jesus, he grows in the knowledge of his own sin.** But as Paul grows in his knowledge of sin, he likewise grows in his knowledge of grace, redemption, and forgiveness. He grows in his love and appreciation for Christ as he realizes more and more what he has been saved from.

**As part of that relational growth process,** Paul instructs believers in Christ in Romans 8:13 & Colossians 3 to put to death the misdeeds of the body - to put to death our earthly nature -

- **Be killing sin or it will be killing you**
- not as a means of earning salvation or garnering more grace, but as a joyful relational response to who He is and what He has given us in Jesus.
- The more we understand what we are saved from, the greater we see our need for the gospel, the more we honor and love Jesus

SO KILLING SIN IS A RESULT & EVIDENCE OF JUSTIFICATION. It is the effect, not the cause of our salvation.

**So although we do still sin**, this sin no longer separates us from God in the ultimate sense - but it does steal the relational joy we ought to have with Him while we are here on this earth.

- Much like the “bricks” my wife and I stacked up between us - we did not become “unmarried” but there was no quality, no joy in our marriage at that time. There was no shalom - things were not as they were meant to be.
- Likewise, if we ignore our sin, it will steal the relational joy God desires for us. It will slowly blind us to the grace and power that is ours in Christ and we will lose sight of our identity as adopted sons and daughters. It degrades and slows our sanctification. It damages those around us.

**So how do we deal with this?** What do we do to kill sin?

**“Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.”**