

Welcome

A few weeks ago as we thought about those 5 reformation Solas, we started to think about how we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, to God's glory alone. Well I'd like us to start thinking a little deeper about God's salvation – how Jesus saves us and how we benefit from His saving work, and particularly this morning why we need to be saved in the first place, and how God works to rescue us.

[Aware there a number of important issues we need to cover as we establish a new church (place of children in church, work of the Holy Spirit, gender issues), but if we're not clear on how God saves, that will affect many other areas of our thinking.]

Why we need at Saviour? God's wrath at our sin

Read: Romans 1:16-32 and pray

Sin is a gloomy topic to begin with isn't it? We might even want to ignore it. But it's true that people will never see their need of a savior until they appreciate their sin. Just like a doctor, if we diagnose the illness wrongly, we'll end up handing out the wrong medicine. If we only think sin is a small issue we won't think much of the salvation Jesus brings.

What we think about sin should make a practical difference – it should humble us & cause us to have renewed thankfulness to God.

What do we want to say about humanity apart from God's grace? What is sin?

The Bible speaks a lot about sin and it talks about sin in many different ways (around 50 different words used). It's true that we can only understand the good news of the gospel of Christ as we come to understand the bad news that without Jesus Christ we are dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1).

Many of the words for sin speak of missing the mark, ... of guilt, ... and of rebellion against a King. We deviate from the path God wants us to follow, it makes us unclean before Him and we need to be cleansed.

Iniquity means we bear guilt before God and are therefore under His punishment. We transgress, rebelling in open defiance against a great king.¹

Listen to some ways sin is described in Scripture:

Jeremiah 2:13, *"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."*

Romans 14:23, *"Everything that does not come from faith is sin."*

Hebrews 3:12, *"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God."*

1 John 3:4, *"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness."*

But perhaps the key concept behind the biblical understanding of sin is **Idolatry** or **False Worship**. Famously, in the passage we read from Rom. 1 Paul says God's wrath is upon us? Why? Well v.18 because we suppress the truth about God that's written all over creation, and instead of worshipping the one true God we inexcusably pursue idols instead, v.21-23

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²

We didn't stop worshipping when we turn our back on God, we just worship something else and that's idolatry. We all worship, we worship either the God who made us, or we worship an idol.

Whatever "sins" I do, the heart of my problem is that deep down I reject God as God and I devote my heart to something else. And God rightly hates idolatry

¹ Other bible words for sin are ungodliness, trouble, emptiness, falsehood, worthlessness, foolishness, stupidity, sickness, injustice, evil, error, lack of reverence, debt, ruin

² Romans 1:21-23

because it robs Him of His rightful glory – it leaves us guilty and unclean before Him and liable to His just punishment.

How does sin affect us?

Paul rightly summarizes our situation left to ourselves in Rom.3:10

“None is righteous, no, not one;

11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.

12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”³

Every one who has ever lived, apart from the Lord Jesus Himself, is left to themselves, dead in sin and under God’s condemnation. There are no ‘good’ people, we need to remember that in our evangelism – everybody you will ever meet, including you and me are sinners.

But not only are we all sinners, every part of every person is affected by sin.

Christians have referred to this as **Total Depravity**.

Be clear, that doesn’t mean that we’re all as sinful as we possibly could be, but it does mean every dimension and faculty of every person is infected by sin - our thoughts, words, our actions. Look again at Romans 3:10-18 – Paul mentions our “throat”, “tongues”, “lips”, “mouth”, “feet” and “eyes”. He goes on to say in Romans 8:7-8

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God⁴

Sin is all-pervasive, like a drop of poison in a glass of water – it’s not that the whole glass is poison but that the whole glass is poisoned. Our intellect, our will, emotions, desires, our culture, our morality, even our conscience, every part of us is affected.

Sin affects not only what we do, but also what we approve and disapprove of (e.g. Isa 5:20, Rom 1:32). Even our good deeds and our virtues are defiled by our sin (e.g. Isa 64:6).

Therefore we are unable to save ourselves

It is impossible for someone controlled by sin to do anything that pleases God, because every part of them is infected by sin. We therefore cannot do anything to **fix** this problem, the Bible speaks of us as being enslaved to sin.

The effect of this on our standing before God is to render us spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1), blind to the glory of God in Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).⁵ We can’t raise ourselves from the mortuary slab and do anything.

Our total depravity, being infected by sin in every part of us leads to our total inability. Apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit, we are powerless to please God (e.g. Rom 8:7-8) and powerless to save ourselves (e.g. Rom 8:2-4).

And this is just how Jesus speaks of unbelievers, especially in John’s gospel. In John 8:34 Jesus says to the Pharisees that we are “*slaves to sin*”. That is sin is the master holding us captive. We are not free to choose God, we don’t have free will in that way – we do sins necessarily as slaves of our master.

How then can God hold us responsible for our sin? Well because we want to sin. That’s what Jesus says in John 8:44

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires⁶

We are enslaved to sin but we are willing captives, left to ourselves we don’t want to break free of sin’s hold on us – we want to sin. Nobody needs to force us to sin.

³ Romans 3:10–12

⁴ Romans 8:7–8

⁵ See also Jeremiah 17:9, our hearts are deceitful above all things and beyond cure, our illness is terminal and we cannot heal it.

⁶ John 8:44

Here's an illustration, imagine a man in a room and there's a door in the room but it only has a handle on the outside. The man cannot get out of the room, he's bound there, but actually he never tries to get out because he likes the room so much.

He's not free to leave the room, but he is free to do what he wants, and he wants to stay in the room.

Likewise we are not free to turn from our bondage to sin and turn to Christ, but we are free to do exactly what we want, which is to stay in our sin and reject Jesus.⁷

We are slaves of sin, but we are willful slaves of sin, it's what we want. And Jesus says in John 8 that He is the only way we can be freed from this slavery.

How did we get in this state?

How did we get into this state where we're all willing slaves to sin? After all, in the beginning God created humanity and behold it was very good.

The answer has been referred to as the doctrine of 'original sin', not a term you'll find in the Bible but a term meaning the sin that derives or comes from our origin. And it takes us back to Adam, and to his story, which is our story. Listen to how Paul speaks of what happened in the garden of Eden,

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners⁸

When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, turning His back in rebellion to God His maker, not only He, but the whole of creation fell into death. The consequences of Adam's first sin against God, not just for himself, but for the rest of humanity is that we are all born in sin – our nature is sinful – because of Adam's sin, humanity as a race are now sinners by nature.

⁷ So the *Westminster Confession of Faith* IX.3 - Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.

⁸ Romans 5:19

It's why we don't need to teach our children to sin.

Adam wasn't just our great, great ancestor; God gave Adam the role of being the head of all humanity. He was our king, our leader, our **covenant head** acting as a representative on behalf of the whole human race, so that when Adam acted in rebellion against God, all of those us who are sons of Adam also fell.

Think of David Davies negotiating with the EU as our UK representative. When the EU do business with David Davies, they're actually doing business with all of us in the UK. So it's as if we were actually in the Garden of Eden with Adam.

That is we're not sinners primarily because we do sins, but rather we do sins because we are since we fell in Adam, by nature sinners.

Maybe that's hard to grasp or seems unfair, but first we need to remember it's God's Sovereign right to do things however He desires, but also we need to remember that this is also the way God works to save us, with Christ acting as the representative of all those He saves. That's how Paul continues His argument in Romans 5:19.

What is God's response to sin?

God responds to sin with a holy hatred. A good, holy, righteous God must hate sin. Why? Because as we saw earlier, **sin is primarily against** God. King David can commit adultery & murder, yet right say to the Lord, *"Against you only have I sinned,"* (Ps. 51:

When we share the gospel we're not simply trying to fix people's broken lives, our biggest problem is that we face a God who is rightly aggrieved at us.

That means, as sinners every one of us by nature, are under God's wrath. The statement "God hates the sin but loves the sinner," is misleading to say the least. Listen to Psalm 5:5, "you hate all evildoers." Paul says of Christians, we

were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.⁹

And Jesus himself says

*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*¹⁰

So that actually sin isn't the biggest problem we face, God's righteous wrath at sinners is our biggest problem. And our good news of Jesus Christ the Saviour comes to us as those who are dead sinners, willing slaves of sin, unable to save ourselves and in need of God to reach out and rescue us.

So What: The understanding that outside of Christ we are totally depraved, not as sinful as we might be but affected by sin in every faculty and willingly slaves of sin means that

- *"I am more wicked than I ever imagined"* ... that's the beginning of the Christianity Explored old strapline and it's true. We must see our desperate need of Christ as a Saviour, without whom we are lost. Do we really believe that about ourselves, because it's vital that we do?
- We will understand why people do awful things, and won't be surprised. People aren't basically good – none of us are.
- And that means we will have compassion on the lost and recognize apart from God's free grace they are no worse than ourselves,
- in our evangelism genuine conversion is always a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Salvation must be 100% God's work – it can't be He does His bit and I do mine,

Listen to the great Baptist minister, Charles Spurgeon:

"I will go as far as Martin Luther, where he says, "If any man ascribes anything of salvation, even the very least thing, to the free will of man, he knows nothing of grace, and he has not learned Jesus Christ rightly."
(Sermons, Vol. 1, p.395)

"We declare on scriptural authority that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, so inclined to everything that is evil, and so disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful, supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human will ever be constrained toward Christ." (Sermons, Vol. 4, p.139)

- as parents our children are inheritors of the same sinful nature as ourselves and need to be pointed to Christ
- we are driven to prayer and praise in humble adoration of the grace God has shown to sinners like us

Well if this is what we're like in our sin, how is it that anyone is saved?

Questions

⁹ Ephesians 2:3

¹⁰ John 3:36