



1

THINK ABOUT THIS

“Hate evil, you who love the LORD. . . .” (Ps. 97:10)

I will always remember a little old grandma who heard that I was studying to be a pastor and wanted to give me a bit of advice before I headed off to serve at my first church. “Whatever you do,” she said, “don’t talk about sin. I used to go to a church where the pastor always talked about sin. It made me miserable. But the pastor of the church I go to now never talks about sin, and I love it.” Sadly, her attitude is not all that unusual. Many people just love not talking about sin.

That is a problem. It is a problem because God’s attitude toward the subject of sin is far different from that little old grandma’s attitude. To God, talking about sin is important. It is so important that if a person does not get what God has to say about sin, he will not get anything else.

I realize that this is blunt, but it is the truth. Understanding what the Bible teaches about sin is essential to under-

standing what the Bible teaches about everything else. And if we do not understand what the Bible teaches about sin, we certainly will not be able to understand God. In particular, we will never be able to figure out what He is so angry about.

I remember during my first year of college that I doubted God as I never had before. I had a difficult time coming to terms with His judgment on sin: a man put out his hand to steady the ark and he was struck dead; Moses got angry and he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land; and Adam and Eve ate some fruit and the whole world was sentenced to judgment. After a year's worth of struggle, I finally figured out what the problem was, and it was not with God. It was with me. I did not think sin was as bad as it really is, and as a result, I could not understand how right God's wrath really is.

Besides not being able to understand God, if we do not understand what the Bible teaches about sin, we will never be able to understand ourselves. If we want to figure out why we get angry, why we are selfish, why we treat people the way we do, why we have problems in our relationships, or why we are depressed, it is not enough to curl up on a couch and have a good cry. We have to understand what the Bible has to say about sin!

To take it a step further, we have to understand what the Bible teaches about sin in order to understand the world itself. Scattered across the globe are scholars, philosophers, and activists who are all trying to identify the source of our problems in the world today. They usually blame the world's problems on circumstances, economic conditions, poor parenting, or a lack of education. After years of research, they tell us things

like: “Want to stop war? Make the nations prosperous.” Or: “Want to wipe out crime in the inner city? Make sure kids get a proper education.” Sorry, but these kinds of solutions do not cut it. They fall far short because they fail to deal with the root of the problem. They do not take into consideration what the Bible teaches about sin.

Quite frankly, the Bible will be one long, confusing book if we do not understand sin. Salvation, God’s judgment, hell, heaven, death, punishment, justification, propitiation, and redemption make no sense apart from sin.

Considering that, what doctrine might Satan want to attack most? It is no surprise that Satan is relentless in his attack on what the Bible teaches about sin. By simply tampering with the doctrine of sin, he is able to make chaos of the Christian faith. If he can get us to think erroneously or even superficially about sin, he has us where he wants us. He knows that if we have a wrong understanding of sin, we will have a wrong understanding of everything else.

I am convinced that many problems in the church today can be traced back to a wrong understanding of sin. Churches are filled with individuals who are self-righteous and who are trusting in their own good works for salvation. Many people believe they are Christians because they are nice people, because they grew up in a Christian family, or because they go to church. Why is this? It is because they do not have any idea of the seriousness of their sin. If they could understand sin’s seriousness, they would also quickly understand the folly of trusting for salvation in being baptized, going to church, or being born into a Christian family.

Our churches are filled with Christians who are not growing spiritually. Show me a Christian who is not growing, and I will show you a person who does not take sin seriously. Many people say that they want to grow, but really do not mean it—at least not enough. Mostly, they just like to say they want to grow. That way they can appear to be holy while continuing to indulge in the very things that keep them from being holy. They like the benefits of a godly life, but they do not want to make the sacrifices required in order to experience those benefits. They want to be godly, but they do not *really* want to be godly. They love their sin too much, and they will not deal with it until they grieve over it.

Although every true Christian has, at one point in his life, at least caught a glimpse of the seriousness of sin, it is easy to forget just how terrible it really is as we continue in our Christian walk. When that begins to happen, we can be sure that we have wandered far from God; for the more we get to know God, the more we will hate sin. When men see God for who He really is, they see themselves for who they really are. And when they see themselves for who they really are, their cry is the same: “Woe is me!”

Think about Paul as he grew in his Christian life. Early on, he wrote: “For I am the least of the apostles . . .” (1 Cor. 15:9). Later, he identified himself as “the very least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8). Finally, toward the very end of his life, he concluded: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all” (1 Tim. 1:15). The closer Paul got to the Light, the more the darkness of his heart was exposed.

It is certainly not the most pleasant experience in the world to have the darkness of our own hearts exposed. If we are willing to turn on the light of God's Word, however, we will see things about Jesus Christ that we have never seen before. When we think of ourselves adoringly, we think of Christ sparingly. But when we stop boasting in ourselves and begin to admit the truth about us, we become smaller in our own eyes and Christ becomes greater and more precious to us.

I appreciate how Charles Spurgeon once put it:

There are some professing Christians who can speak of themselves in terms of admiration; but, from my inmost heart, I loathe such speeches more and more every day that I live. Those who talk in such a boastful fashion must be constituted very differently from me. While they are congratulating themselves, I have to lie humbly at the foot of Christ's Cross, and marvel that I am saved at all, for I know that I am saved. I have to wonder that I do not believe Christ more, and equally wonder that I am privileged to believe in Him at all—to wonder that I do not love Him more, and equally to wonder that I am not holier, and equally to wonder that I have any desire to be holy at all considering what a polluted, debased, depraved nature I find still within my soul, notwithstanding all that divine grace has done in me. If God were ever to allow the fountains of the great deeps of depravity to break up in the best man that lives, he would make as bad a devil as the devil himself is. I care nothing for what these boasters say concerning their own perfections; I feel sure that they do not know themselves, or they

could not talk as they often do. There is tinder enough in the saint who is nearest to heaven to kindle another hell if God should but permit a spark to fall upon it. In the very best of men there is an infernal and well-nigh infinite depth of depravity. Some Christians never seem to find this out. I almost wish that they might not do so, for it is a painful discovery for anyone to make; but it has the beneficial effect of making us cease from trusting in ourselves, and causing us to glory only in the Lord.¹

I hope it is starting to become clear why it is so important for us to take a good, long, hard look at what the Bible teaches about sin. Before we can talk about overcoming it, we must see it for what it is. Doing this will not be easy. It will be uncomfortable. But it will be worth it! For by understanding the seriousness of sin, we will be better able to understand the greatness of God, the wonders of His grace, the beauty of Jesus Christ, and the process of sanctification.

A P P L I C A T I O N A N D D I S C U S S I O N S U G G E S T I O N S

1. How would you describe our culture's attitude toward the subject of sin?
2. What are some reasons why it is important to understand what the Bible says about sin?
3. Describe several specific ways that a wrong understanding of sin affects other areas of a person's spiritual life.

4. What can we learn from the apostle Paul's attitude toward his sinfulness as he grew in his Christian life?
5. Why do you think it is easy to forget how terrible sin really is?
6. What happens to us spiritually when we forget how terrible our sin really is? Give specific examples from Scripture.
7. What commitment should you make as a result of what you have learned from this chapter?