

The Nature of Sin

Purpose of the Series

- First, I should start by saying this will not be a “fire and brimstone” or “repent or perish” or “you’re a really bad person” type of lesson. Part of it will be informational, but more importantly, I believe I can clear up some difficult passages which led to bad theology around how we are to live our lives in the Christian way, how we can “remain” saved Christians, and how to know if we or someone we care about has left the faith.
- Second, I’d like to study the nature of sin (as the title implies) and, in doing so, discover the heart or essence of what sin is. We’ll see that the Bible uses the word “sin”, from the Hebrew כִּחַת (kha-ta) and the Greek $\text{\u0391}\mu\alpha\rho\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$ (ham-ar-tia), fairly loosely and expects the reader to know what is meant.

Part 1: Categories of Sin

I. What does “sin” mean?

- a. As mentioned above, the English word “sin” comes from the Hebrew כִּחַת (kha-ta) and the Greek $\text{\u0391}\mu\alpha\rho\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha$ (ham-ar-tia). Both the Hebrew and Greek are archery terms meaning “to missing the mark” and, by extension, “to fail to meet one’s goal”.
- b. The Latin word in the Vulgate is “peccatum”, which means, “a moral offense, or transgression”. Obviously, sin and peccatum don’t sound the same. Sin comes from Latin, “sons”, then the proto-German, “sundio”, and, finally, the Old English, “synn”. All these mean “guilty”.
- c. That’s an interesting progression. I’m not good at archery, and basically missed the mark every time I tried—but I never felt guilty or that I’d committed a morel offense. What I’ve discovered in my studies is that “sin” in Christian and Jewish theology developed to encompass a broader, more profound meaning than simply missing a mark—it came to signify willful disobedience, moral failure, or rebellion against God’s commands. So basically, the translators got it right and we shouldn’t read too much into the archery thing.

II. Are there categories? Is it dangerous to make categories?

- a. In some sense there is danger in making categories. Rom 3:22f-23 says, “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Regardless of whether you just told a lie or you’re a serial killer (though I hope not) you’ve missed the mark.
- b. People like to make artificial spectrums like “Mother Theresa” to “Hitler”. They like to compare themselves to people whose sin they assess is worse than theirs to make themselves feel better. This is definitely not my intention.
- c. Nevertheless, verses in both the Old Testament and New Testament do seem to create certain categories or types of sin.

III. Major categories of sin

- a. From Catholicism: Original, Mortal, and Venial
 - i. I don't believe in these but to cover all the bases.
 - ii. Original: stemming from Adam's disobedience in the garden, present at birth and forgiven by baptism (whether conscious of or not).
 - iii. Mortal: Grave matter done in full knowledge and consent, removes friendship with God, must be confessed. From catholic.com: *Any mortal sins that you confessed or meant to confess but did not through no fault of your own are forgiven. You do need to mention them the next time you go to confession. For the future, I recommend stating all of your mortal sins first, and then state your venial sins. If the priest begins absolution before you are finished confessing, you can politely interrupt him by saying, "I am so sorry, Father, but I still have more mortal sins I must confess."*
 - iv. Venial: Less serious, temporal punishment, forgiven by mass, penance, or purgatory.
- b. Omission vs. Commission. James 4:17 *Anyone who knows the good they ought to do but doesn't do it has sinned.* Here we can see there is no excuse for failing to do God's good work (Eph 2:10).
- c. Individual vs. Corporate.
 - i. This is primarily an Old Covenant thing.
 1. Exodus 32: systemic idolatry. The golden calf story. All who worshipped the calf had their names blotted out of the book, and many of the paid with their lives with a plague that was sent.
 2. Numbers 13 and 14: 10 of the 12 spies give a bad report and many of the assembly doubt they should go in. All of Israel paid with their lives over the next 40 years except Joshua and Caleb.
 - ii. There are a few examples in the New Testament.
 1. 1Cor 11:17-34, esp. v30 says "many are weak and a number had *fallen asleep*" due to improperly taking communion.
 2. Revelation 3: the letters to the churches. We can see God taking an assessment of the general faith and behavior of each church.
- d. Old Covenant vs. New Covenant
 - i. There's definitely a difference in way the OC talks about sin and how the NC does. Remember the NC is more like Acts-Rev, and Mat-John are more OC than NC. See Part 6 of the Pharisaical Lens.
 - ii. In the OC, there were progressively higher sacrifices for different classes of sin: unclean for a time, unclean and wash, sacrifice flour/bird/lamb/bull, excommunication, and death by stoning.
- e. The worst types:
 - i. Forgivable vs. Unforgivable. Mat 12:31-32. What could Jesus possibly be talking about? I spoke about this in Part 4 of "The Era of the Spirit", which you can review, but I will speak more about this in the coming parts of this series.

- ii. Leads to death vs. doesn't lead to death. 1John 5:16-18. This passage is just plain weird...I mean there's a sin that leads to death and he doesn't tell us what it is? Again I'll cover this in upcoming episodes.
- iii. Repentable vs. non-repentable. Heb 6
- iv. Sacrifice left vs. no sacrifice left. Heb 10

IV. Summary

- a. There are some potentially useful ways of categorizing sin.
- b. Next two weeks we're going to tackle important saved vs. unsaved sins and see if we can clear up confusion about the "unforgivable sin", "sins that lead to death", "and sins for which there is no sacrifice left". Hint: I think you'll be relieved by what these terms really mean.

Part 2: The Sin that Leads to Death

Review from last week:

- We talked about the etymology and evolution of the word “sin”, how it comes from the Hebrew חַטָּא (kha-ta) and the Greek ἁμαρτία (ham-ar-tia), and that it signifies willful disobedience, moral failure, or rebellion against God’s commands.
- There is danger in making categories of sin when the purpose is to compare oneself against someone else. “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- There are several ways to categorize sin (little vs. big, committed vs. omitted, by mistake vs. intentionally), but the most serious category is forgivable vs. unforgivable.

I. What could possibly make is sin unforgivable?

- a. Isn’t God all-powerful?
- b. Isa 59:1-2. It’s not about a limitation of God, but about humans. In a way it’s about a definition or truth: If God provides a way to connect with him, you must believe it and accept it—you cannot make your own method.
- c. John 3:16-18 is the perfect example of this: but whoever *does not believe* is *condemned already* because they have not believed.

II. Unforgivable Sins

- a. Mat 12:30-32 (also in Mark 3:28-29, Luke 12:10) – If this means, “Say something bad about the Holy Spirit and you’re done!” then why would saying bad things about Jesus (who is also God) be okay? It makes much more sense that if it’s the indwelling Spirit that saves us, then while we reject and until we accept the Spirit we’re in a lost state. (Just like John 3 said: while we don’t believe and until we do believe, we’re condemned.)
- b. Two passages from Hebrews.
 - i. Firstly, is Hebrews written to Jews who needed to become Christians or to Jewish Christians considering returning to Judaism? It could be either or both. The first 4 chapters seem to be to the first group, as the author argues the superiority of Christ. How you take it determines whether he’s talking about “missing out on salvation” or “losing one’s salvation”.
 1. Note that simply using the words brother and sister do not necessarily mean “in Christ”.
 2. The use of “sin” is contextual since it could mean disobedience to the Law or the rejection of the Holy Spirit.
 - ii. Heb 6:4-6 – This is the “falling away” passage. If you interpret “once been enlightened”, “tasted the heavenly gift”, and “shared in the Holy Spirit” as “one who is already saved”, then the passage would mean that they

committed the unforgivable sin of rejecting (blaspheming) the Holy Spirit and now the Spirit will depart from them. But the words “once”, “tasted” and “shared” seem to be carefully written to Jews who have participated in God’s plan of salvation but who must now transition to the New Covenant.

- iii. Heb 10:26-27 – ooh that sounds bad, and it is.
 1. If Hebrews is to Jews who need to convert, this means if they keep rejecting the Holy Spirit (“keep on sinning”) their current way of forgiving sins via the sacrifice of animals no longer works (i.e. “no sacrifice for sins left”) and they should be in fear of hell.
 2. If Hebrews is to Jewish Christians, the sin would be if they keep on deliberately participating in the sacrifice animals, they will lose the Spirit and they should expect hell because there is no sacrifice of sins left. “Deliberate” may point to sacrifices still happening at the temple where they go, but they’re not participating.
- iv. 1 John 5:16-18 – Hmm...this is bizarre.
 1. Remember that life and death can be spiritual or physical or both.
 2. The “shouldn’t pray for them” clause seems counterintuitive to Christianity. Is there a scenario under which it would be wrong to pray for someone who is doing something wrong?
 3. I think v18 is key: “...does not continue to sin”? Of course we continue to sin! John himself says in chapter 1 verse 8, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”. Thus, identifying the sin John is referring to is paramount. If the sin is the same as Hebrews, “continuing to participate in the OC sacrificial system”, then everything makes sense.
 - a. From earlier, the use of brother and sister doesn’t have to be a fellow Christian; it could be a fellow Jew.
 - b. Verse 16, “pray that God will give them life” could mean, “pray that God will give them the indwelling Holy Spirit which is life”.
 - c. The “leads to death” could mean the death of an animal, for instance, the death of the person (i.e. Sabbath breaking, murder, infidelity), or the death of one’s soul like Heb 10:26.
 - d. Verse 17, “all wrongdoing is sin” and “there is a sin that does not lead to death” would mean “breaking any law of Moses is wrong, but in most cases the remedy is not the death of an animal or the execution of lawbreaker”.
 - e. Verse 18, “anyone born of God does not continue to sin” would mean, “Christians know that Christ was the final

sacrifice and therefore they do not participate in any more animal sacrifices”, or “anyone born again is filled with the Spirit and can no longer sin because Christ’s blood justified them”.

- f. Verse 18f, “the One who was born of God” is Jesus and he keeps them safe from the evil one.
 - g. Verse 18 really rings of John 3:3 and 5: “unless they are born again” and “no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.”
- v. Act 5:1-5 Lying about being led by the Spirit is a serious offense in the Church.
- 1. What did they do? Simply put, they lied to the body of Christ. They started out good: let’s sell our house so that we can give to the church. Then they realized (for whatever reason) that they could not give all of the proceeds. Then it turned into, let’s give what we can, keep the rest, but tell the church we gave it all.
 - 2. This seems like a simple and small offense, but what makes it grave is that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is involved.
 - 3. This doesn’t seem to happen often—in fact, to my knowledge, there’s no record of anyone else dying in church because they lied about what they gave in church. Perhaps God made examples of Ananias and Saphira like He did with Achan in Joshua 7.
 - 4. Were they not saved, saved and then lost, or saved and then dead? Who knows. I’d like to believe they were saved, and I do believe they could have been. It does not appear they committed the unforgivable sin as they joined the early church and responded to the Gospel.

III. Summary

- a. The answer to “what are unforgivable sins” is: Rebellion or rejection of God’s Covenant.
 - i. Adam and Eve rebelled against the Covenant of the Garden: Don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—if you do you’ll die. As I talked about in Part X the Era of the Spirit, the death was a spiritual one.
 - ii. Israel rebelled against God’s promise that he would bring them into a great land when they listened to the 10 spies. And they all died physically in the desert wandering around. Often Israel’s physical things are spiritual things in the New Covenant.
 - iii. Israel rebelled against God when they wanted a human king. After Israel did this, their spiritual condition was forever linked to the king’s heart’s condition.

- iv. Under the New Covenant, the unforgivable sin is rejecting God's Holy Spirit either through ignorance or willfulness. There are many ways to say this: grace vs works, surrender vs resist, trust vs. doubt, faith vs. fear, etc.
- v. Therefore, it's not that there's some sin out there that's so terrible that once you've committed it God can never forgive you.

Next week we'll talk about what it means that, "Jesus died for the sins of the world".

Part 3: Jesus Died for all of the World's Sins

Review from last week:

- Remember, we're trying to define the nature of sin, and in Part 1 we talked about categorizing sin. Out of this came the grave category of "sins that are unforgivable and lead to death".
- In Part 2 we covered the four passages that talk about unforgivable sins: Jesus in Mat 12, the author of Hebrews in Heb 6 and 10, and John in 1 John 5. Furthermore, I connected these four passages to the same sin: the rejection of God's saving pathway, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit made available by Christ's work on the cross and his resurrection.
- I ended another unique and scary passage, Acts 5 and the story of Ananias and Saphira, and posited, did they commit the unforgivable sin? I don't believe so as it does not appear they rejected God as they responded to the Gospel and joined the early church. If it was the case that they were only posing as disciples and showed their rejection of God's spirit by willfully lying to the church. Clearly once a person is dead, they can no longer repent of anything.

I. Did Jesus die for the sins of the world?

- a. Every Christian would answer this with a resounding "yes!"
- b. John the Baptist said so in John 1:29, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"
- c. If Jesus did die for the sins of the world, then would that mean everyone's sins are already forgiven?
- d. Christian theologians would say no. They say things like "Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient for all but only applies to true Christians." They say this because salvation directly ties to the forgiveness of sins; therefore, if everyone's sins were forgiven with or without believing in Christ, then everyone would be saved as well.
- e. But is this the case? Does the forgiveness of sins equate to salvation? If that wasn't the case, then perhaps people's sins could be forgiven but they would still lack something else which itself is a barrier to salvation.

II. How do we sin?

- a. Most would say, "by doing something bad". Just bad? What about a white lie? How about, "by doing something evil"? How about the sins of *omission*? "Okay, by doing something evil or not doing something good."
- b. Clearly this is not a sufficient definition. What is evil? What is good? This is exactly the point God tried to make to Adam and Eve in the Garden: humans cannot comprehend good and evil, therefore we should not try to attain the

knowledge of good and evil but instead trust God and learn what he wants from us through his presence within us. However, in their early state of maturity, the best he could communicate is, "Do eat from that tree or you'll die."

- c. But they ate from the tree anyway and were immediately judged by their adherence to all that is good and their avoidance of all that is evil without the ability to comprehend good and evil.
- d. Their offspring were also without the spirit and condemned, and humanity began to spiral out of control. What about starting with a clean slate of just a couple of hand-picked people? This is Noah and the flood, and obviously that didn't work—although we have no way of knowing what the world would be like had God not destroyed all humans but Noah and his family. So we can know that this had an effect, but was not sufficient.
- e. What if God chose another faithful people and gave a specific set of instructions about good and evil the nation he would create from this faithful man? This is Abraham and Israel.
- f. But even if humanity is given a definition of good and evil, it still needs provisions for what to do when someone violates this knowingly or unknowingly. Therefore, God made a covenant with Moses and the people of Israel, giving them the Law which also provides ways of atonement, "a process of healing the relationship between humans and God" through the sacrificial system.
- g. Therefore, this limited history of God and humanity leads to this (at least for Israel, the nation under the covenant): *to sin is to break the covenant*. Since the covenant provides atonement, this means to break a law and not be atoned.
- h. Rom 5:13 summarizes this well, "To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not *charged* against anyone's account where there is no law." We use the word sin rather loosely, but the sin we should first and foremost be concerned about is this type of "charged sin".
- i. Even with atonement for laws broken with a priori knowledge, and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur, the holiest day in Judaism) for the sins of all of Israel done without knowledge, Israel as a nation continued to sin.
- j. But God used Israel as a conduit through which He could come and atone once and for all for not just the Law, but for the original sin of Adam and Eve. All of Romans 5 addresses this idea beautifully, but let's read Rom 5:18-19 for the sake of time.

III. **Tell me, how do we sin?**

- a. Christ's death on the cross ended not only the Old Covenant; but more importantly, he ended the curse of Adam and Eve's partaking of the fruit of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (this is symbolized by the withering of the fig tree).
- b. Humanity is no longer condemned for their inability to adhere to Good and Evil; but still has the knowledge of Good and Evil which they are unable to comprehend. Therefore, ***Jesus did die for the sins of the world.***

- c. So why aren't we all saved regardless of our belief or faith in Jesus? Answer: because salvation is not just a matter of sin, but of sin *and* death.
- d. Metaphor of a person killed by Ebola: They are dead because Ebola made their body incapable of housing their spirit and therefore their spirit departed. If you are miraculously able to remove the Ebola from their body, the body will still be dead because there is no spirit. If you miraculously return their spirit to their body but it still has Ebola, the spirit will simply depart again. One must do both, heal the body and return the spirit.
- e. By erasing the curse of the Garden, Jesus killed the Ebola (the sin), but it remains spiritually dead because God's Spirit is not present.
- f. Therefore, under the New Covenant that Jesus brought into existence upon his death and resurrection, one sins (charged sin) by rejecting the way which God provided to return his Spirit into your body. This is the unforgivable sin: it is unforgivable by definition because until the remedy is accepted, one remains in a state of spiritual death. Read Mat 12:31-32. "This age" is the Era of Sin which is the time of the Old Covenant. The "age to come" is the New Covenant. It could be talking about Heaven, but likely not because once someone is dead, there is no meaning to forgiveness.
- g. Mat 12:43-45. This is an odd passage, but it's still in the context of Mat 12:31. So it has to deal with spiritual death and spiritual life somehow. Imagine the impure spirit is the knowledge of good and evil. Jesus' death removes this spirit. Now the body is empty. Under the New Covenant, we must fill this void with the Holy Spirit, otherwise, other types of spirits will return making things even worse because now the remedy is available but is rejected.

In next the week several weeks, we'll spend some more time in Romans reinforcing these ideas.

Part 4: God's Righteous Judgment of Jews and Gentiles

I'm not going to start with a review of last week, per se, because really the entire episode is a review. Last week's concept of, "Christ died for all the world's sin by ending the condemnation of the Garden, ushering in the possibility of salvation through the restoration of God's Spirit in us", is indeed a unique and perhaps complicated twist of the topic of sin and salvation. Therefore, we will spend today reinforcing last week's ideas.

I. Romans 1-4: Opening arguments

- a. Note that the chapter breaks were put in by men and not always the logical places for breaks.
- b. Rom 1:18-2:11 – Everyone is without excuse because we are meant to see God in the creation.
 - i. Where did the creation come from? How did the earth's amazing conditions come about? How did the beauty of God's creation arise?
 - ii. This concept stems from the Jewish believe that, while their lot as a nation was to follow all of God's commands in the Law, Gentiles were meant to acknowledge God, glorify him, and give thanks to him. Cornelius in Acts 10 is a good example of this.
- c. Rom 2:1-11: Humans are "virtue-signaling machines". You can only judge others on things that "get your goat" or "get under your skin", and these are the things of which we have intimate knowledge primarily by doing or having done it.
- d. Rom 2:12-16 – No one can make it on their own merit regardless of what law you're under.
- e. Rom 2:17-3:20 – The Law is only useful to those who have their "heart circumcised". The Jews are special in that they were entrusted with the words of God in the Law in order to provide a place for the Messiah even if not all of the Jews were faithful. The advantage the Jews have is the Law allows a person to become conscious of their sin (unlike the Gentiles who are oblivious to sin).
- f. Rom 3:21-4:25 – The promises of God come through faith.
 - i. Verse 21-24 – Everyone, the Jews and the Gentiles, are justified (just-as-if-I-never-sinned) through faith.
 - ii. Verses 25-31 – God demonstrates his own righteousness by living and dying as a man. God could not simply wave his wand and declare a "mulligan". It's impossible for us to fathom how a being can be 100% merciful and 100% righteous at the same time. But here we have an example: he left sins committed beforehand unpunished knowing that he himself would be the sacrifice for all humanity at the present time (1st

century AD that is). Because He is just, he can also justify. Notice it is all God and not from us; therefore, we cannot boast about anything.

- iii. 4:1-25 – This has always been the case: any righteousness we might have comes from God through faith in his promises. It was Abraham’s faith that “was credited to him as righteousness”.

g. Summary

- i. Jews and Gentiles are in the same “lost boat” as far as sin it concerned even though one could say they’re in two boats: Boat #1 is recognizing God through the creation and glorifying him (but without any insight or appearances from God), and Boat #2 is having the Law and being near God (fearfully) and seeing God act occasionally, but still not being able to fully follow the Law.
- ii. The promises of God come from God through faith in him and the promises themselves.
- iii. We are all justified (past, present, and future humans regardless of their status), from the curse of the Garden through Christ’s work (see the last verse, 4:25).

For next week, we’ll discuss the evidence contained in Romans 5-7: Jesus’ death, Adam, baptism, and our endless struggle with sin.

Part 5: The Evidence of God's Righteousness

Last week we talked about Paul's "opening arguments" for the court of God judging mankind's sins. He talks separately about the condemnation of Gentiles versus Jews, but in the end they're in the same "lost" boat. Paul ends his opening arguments concluding that the only hope humans have is faith in God's promise. It's a promise that Abraham was first to hear and demonstrated that the faith on humans is credited (counted towards) to them as righteousness.

In the larger picture, we're trying to define sin, especially in respect to the cross. Did something happen when Jesus died on the cross, or did something become possible when Jesus died on the cross, or both? And does our understanding of this matter?

I. Romans 5 – Death through Adam, life through Christ

- a. Verses 5:1-2: Abraham's faith in God (that he could have a son in his old age and further evidenced when he heeded to call to sacrifice that one son) allowed the promise to be made—the promise that all nations would be blessed through his Seed (Gal 3:16,19). Now we have gained access into the grace of God through our faith. Note: Even if you believe the typical theology that Christ's sacrifice was sufficient for all humanity, but that people step into that justification through their faith, it still doesn't take away from the fact that God no longer judges us by our evildoing but by our faith.
- b. Verses 5:3-5: Our suffering and perseverance give those who have the Spirit hope. Those who don't have the Spirit feel abandonment and nihilism (this all for no purpose!).
- c. Verses 5:6-11: God justified us as just the right time. We may not be able to fathom why Jesus didn't come earlier or later, but God had a plan and executed it perfectly. This gives us assurance that God wants to save us and wants to have a relationship with us (as opposed to putting up with us).
 - i. Some have posited why Jesus came when he did. Probably the best question to ask is, "why didn't he come sooner?" Like immediately after the Fall? Something had to happen, and it wasn't just with Adam and Eve but with Humanity itself. In a way you can think of humanity as an organism, growing and learning and changing. It's probably a conjunction of several things that had to occur at the same time.
 - ii. Whatever those things are, something happened at the moment of Jesus' death. Mat 27:50-51, "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. *At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*" This exposed the ark of the covenant, and signified the end of that covenant.

- iii. Father/Child Analogy: running away; premature emancipation; visitation; custody; and committed, fatherly relationship.
 - iv. In essence, in the Garden God said, don't over there because if you do I can't be with you.
 - v. He didn't abandon us, we left him, we were forced to be adults, and we forgot about him for the most part.
 - vi. The Law provided God visitation rights to one of his children.
 - vii. Jesus' death on the cross gave God custody of all his children, but they still can live where they want to (the metaphor breaks down a bit here, because I don't know how God becoming a child and living with his other kids could fit in).
 - viii. The Spirit is like God coming to live with us and be our dad.
- d. Verses 5:12-21: Indeed, Adam's disobedient act of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil did condemn all of humanity to a life of sin and death (whether there was a law or not). Just as this was all messed up by one person, it was also cleared up by the righteous act of one person, which could only happen with God *as that person*.
- i. I've used verse 13 in past episodes because it's helpful for discussing the purpose of the Law.
 - ii. Chapter 4 verse 15 uses "transgression", 5:13 uses "charged sin", and 5:15 uses "trespass".
 - iii. By dying on the cross as a perfect sacrifice, God removed the Law, that is, the illegal areas that if we went there, we'd be guilty of trespass. With no illegal property, we can no longer trespass. But the areas were fenced off for good reason, so if we do venture there, we still pay the consequences (i.e. Natural Law).

Spatial Cognates of Sin

Spatial: The perception of relative locations of objects in an area.
Cognate: Words related or analogous in nature, character, or function.



	Definition	Spatial Relationship
Sin	A general term meaning to miss the mark or to fall short of the glory of God.	To be somewhere you don't belong.
Law	An enumerated instance, case, or type of sin.	Defines areas where one must not go.
Trespass	To intentionally or unintentionally cross a into a region where the individual does not belong.	To cross into an area where you don't belong.
Transgression	To trespass willfully.	To go willfully into an area in which you don't belong.
Iniquity	A deeply rooted and premeditated choice to continue without repentance.	To live in an area in which you don't belong.

II. Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ

- a. Verses 6:1-14: [Note: I talked about this in The Pharisaical Lens Part 7. The “sin type” in a lot these verses is the evildoing type.] We shouldn't live that way because we are dead. Our baptism is a living metaphor; it's like (and spiritually speaking *is*) our funeral. We participate or act out Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. We die metaphorically yet continue to live because we have given the Spirit. Because our death is metaphorical and we still are at the helms of our bodies, we should aim to no longer be enslaved to evil desires and acts. Nevertheless, when we do, we are no under the God's grace (see verse 14).
- b. Verses 6:15-23: The Spirit has set us free from evildoing. We now have access through the Spirit to recovery from the addictive nature of sin. Before our baptism, we had no choice in the matter—we were slaves to sin. Now the Spirit gives us the opportunity (v22 uses the word “benefit”) for sanctification. I've heard various interpretations of v23, but I think the full meaning is: the sin in the Garden meant humans were kicked out of it and no longer had access to the tree of life; this means that all people, even those with the Spirit, will die a physical death; but those with the Spirit will go on to live with God for eternity.

III. Released from the Law of Wrath and Confusion

- a. Verses 7:1-6: Another case for us being dead, this time from the marriage under the Law. Since we're dead, the Law no longer has any binding over us.
- b. Verses 7:7-25: Evidence from the Law: The Law is holy and good, and gives knowledge of what evildoing is, but it also gives enticement, confusion, addiction, and desperation. This however can lead an individual to God and

deliverance (v25a) and the realization that our fleshly nature is still alive and we need to huddle close to and listen to God's Spirit within us (v25f).

Next week we'll get to the good part, the verdict, Romans 8, which makes the claim that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Part 6: The Verdict: No Condemnation in Christ Jesus

Review:

Last week we talked about the evidence of God's righteousness that Paul goes through in Romans 5-7:

- God waited until just the right time to send the Messiah—not a moment earlier or later.
- We were still powerless, God sacrificed himself, and his righteous, innocent blood justified us all.
- Just as sin entered the world through one man, God's grace came to all of us through the sacrifice of one man, Jesus Christ.
- All of those who were baptized into Christ participate in his death, burial and resurrection in order to receive God's indwelling Spirit and gain a new life on earth and later in heaven.
- The Law was created so that sin could be defined, and what is defined as forbidden attracts us and tempts us. When we break God's the law, we learn why sin is sin, and, though our slavery to sin and our actions bring confusion, the experience can bring us to the foot of the cross.

One of the main concepts behind this series, *The Nature of Sin*, is the idea that Christ died for the sins of the world and that something real happened at the moment of his death on the cross. Last week I talked about Mat 27:50, which tells us the curtain of the temple was torn in two, exposing the Ark of the Covenant where God's presence dwelled. It was not as though God was confined to this small room called the Holy of Holies, but this a where the High Priest could go to be in the presence God after several strict consecration rituals; therefore, it was humans who needed a place where they could meet God after such consecration rituals were completed. There tearing of the curtain meant that humans would no longer die from being in the presence of God because of their sin. At the moment of Christ's death, the sin of the Garden, which was embodied in the Law, was ended, thereby removing the source of condemnation. With the source of condemnation paid for, humans can then be reconciled to God and saved through his indwelling Spirit.

I did some research on this idea, which is fairly unique within Christendom, and found that the 3rd-century church father, Origen, was an advocate. It is a part of Eastern Orthodox theology (11th century and onward), and some Anabaptists of the 16th century believed this. More recently, I found that a 20-century German theologian, Karl Barth, 1886-1968, taught this theology and called it ***Universal Reconciliation***. Barth is quite an interesting fellow. He was one of the key outspoken opponents of Nazism and was expelled from Germany in 1935 because of his role in the Barmen Declaration of 1934 and his refusal to swear loyalty to Adolf Hitler. He

wrote *The Epistle of the Romans* in 1922 and *Church Dogmatics* in 1967, which was a systematic theology (a system of interpretation which sought to harmonize the stories and doctrines of the entire Bible). This book was the culmination of his life's work and took 35 years to write. It wasn't even complete because there was one last section he was writing when he passed away; nevertheless, the book is over *9000 pages!*

Okay, let's talk about Romans chapter 8.

I. No Condemnation for those in Christ Jesus

- a. Verses 1-8. Note this passage is for those who:
 - i. ...are in Christ Jesus (v1).
 - ii. ...are set free from the law of sin and death (v2).
 - iii. ...do not live according to the flesh (v4).
 - iv. ...do live according to the Spirit (v4).
 - v. ...don't have their minds set on fleshly desires (v5).
 - vi. ...live in accordance with the Spirit (v5).
 - vii. ...have their minds set on what the Spirit desires (v5).
 - viii. ...are not governed by the flesh (v6).
 - ix. ...have their minds governed by the Spirit (v6).
 - x. ...have life and peace (v6).
 - xi. ...submit to the Law (v7).
 - xii. ...are not in the realm of the flesh (v8).
- b. Verses 9-13. Note the conditions in this passage:
 - i. ...not in the realm of the flesh (v9).
 - ii. Have the Spirit of God living in them (v9).
 - iii. If Christ is in them... (v9)
 - iv. If they belong to Christ... (v9)
 - v. If Christ is in you... (v10)
 - vi. If the Spirit is living in you... (v11)
 - vii. Obligated to live by the Spirit (v12).
 - viii. Put to death the misdeeds of the body (v13).

II. Through the Lens of Justification

- a. Rom 8 can be discouraging if you look at through the typical lens of sin.
- b. But if we are justified by Christ (Rom 3 and 5)—and we are—and if we participated in Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Rom 6), then we are filled with the Holy Spirit!
- c. All of Rom 8 applies to us!

III. The Benefits of Living with the Spirit of God in us

- a. It makes us children of God, set free from fear, and therefore can rightly call God our father. It makes us heirs and co-heirs with Christ. (v14-17).
- b. It helps us in our sufferings and weaknesses (v18-27).
- c. God works for our good and justifies and glorifies us (v28-30).
- d. No one and nothing can stand against us as we are chosen by God and can never be separated from the love of Christ (v31-36).
- e. We are conquerors of sin and death and can never be separated from the love of God (v37-39).

Next week we'll talk about reconciliation, sanctification, and salvation from sin.

Part 7: Reconciliation from Christ, Sanctification and Salvation from the Spirit

Last week we talked in detail about Romans chapter 8, the verdict of Paul's legal case for and against mankind. The verdict is great for all those who are in Christ Jesus: there is no condemnation for them nor is there any source of future condemnation. This is idea of Universal Reconciliation: God has already forgiven mankind by removing the source of condemnation, the curse of the Garden and the Law, and has initiated reconciliation. In other words, God did his part and has removed all the barriers that could inhibit humans from reconciling with Him—the ball is now completely in our court, meaning that we must still “do” our part of the reconciliation. I put “do” in quotes because it's not some great work, like climbing the highest mountain or never sinning again, but instead we must accept his indwelling Spirit.

Today we're going to solidify this idea and also talk about sanctification.

I. God's work of Reconciliation 2 Corinthians chapter 5

- a. Read the whole chapter and we'll discuss different verses.
- b. Reconcile means: *to reestablish a relationship after a conflict*. Whereas forgiveness is one-sided, reconciliation requires the cooperation and desire of both parties. It starts with an invitation of reconciliation from one of the parties, typically the one who was offended.
- c. Therefore, forgiveness is the first part of reconciliation, which was accomplished by Christ's death on the cross (v19: not *counting* people's sins against them).
- d. Christ's resurrection allowed the Holy Spirit to return. John 16:7 *But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.*
- e. God's offer of his Holy Spirit to us is his invitation to us to reconcile. Verse 5: *the Spirit is a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*. It is God reaching out to us.
- f. Therefore, it is still up to us to know of God's offer and accept it. As is often the case with two individuals, an abuser and a victim, the abuser may be oblivious to the problem. This is the case with humanity: most do not know of their offense or of God's offer.
- g. This is a purpose God has given us: to help make people aware of their predicament. Verse 19f-20: *And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.* The Gospel message we give spread is embodied in this (I implore you...).

II. Sanctification

- a. Sanctification: the act of making something holy and setting it apart for a special purpose.
- b. 2Cor 5, “we are Christ's ambassadors” is the special purpose that God made for us.

- c. However, the unholiness of our sinful nature interferes with this purpose. Therefore, God seeks to make us more holy like Christ.
- d. The most important thing to keep in mind about sanctification is that it is by and through the Holy Spirit.
- e. 2 Corinthians chapter 3 embodies this idea.

v4-6 *Such confidence we have through Christ before God. ⁵ Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶ He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

v17-18 *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

- f. The sin that gets in the way of being Christ's ambassadors is usually not sins of the flesh, but instead is selfishness (2Cor 5:15 ...should *no longer live for themselves...*). Nevertheless, sins of the flesh do also get in the way.
- g. Some may find it odd that only here, near the end of the series, that I talk about sins of the flesh. As I mentioned at the start of Part 1, the series would not be a "fire and brimstone" or "repent or perish" or "you're a really bad person" type of lesson. How can this be? *The fact is our fleshly sin does not matter much.* What?! In our relationship with God, it is God who forgave all our sins. It is therefore God who took the risk that we would not abuse our freedom to sin.
- h. In conventional Christian dogma, holiness is typically the biggest priority set in the lives of believers.
 - i. In fact, many churches won't accept people *until* they repent of their major sins.
 - ii. This is 180 degrees backwards! It is the Spirit who convicts us of our sin and helps in our repentance; why deny someone the very thing that they need?
 - iii. The conventional answer to this is that the church sees itself as taking a risk when they let someone in. What if they are not serious? Requiring a person to change their lives proves their sincerity and the reality of their belief, right?
 - iv. It is not the church that is at risk—remember, God took the risk when he sent his son as a sin offering.
 - v. What if a person's sins starts corrupting existing members? The church has every right to expel someone in this situation. 1Cor 5 is about this. Verses 6, 9-11 ("eat" likely refers to the Lord's Supper), and verse 5.
- i. Fleshly sin is a high priority with our human relationships. Try telling a loved one, "you've got to forgive me and accept me as I am even though I keep hurting

you". Some churches profess this, but as 1Cor 5:5 indicates, breaking relationships is to help someone to wake up and hopefully be saved.

Next week, we'll wrap up this series, summarizing the major points and connecting the dots.

Part 8: What is the Nature of Sin?

Last week we talked about how God has done his part of reconciliation with mankind described eloquently in 2Cor 5. It is not that though was some mutual conflict between man and him that had to be worked out, but that God was rescuing humans from the tragedy created from the first human's disobedience in the Garden. God did this by living in a man within the creation, showing that only he had the capability to comprehend knowledge of good and evil, offering himself as an innocent sacrifice of atonement, and removing the source of condemnation between himself and mankind. This is the idea of Universal Reconciliation—not that humans are universally saved, as reconciliation requires the volitionⁱ of both parties—but that God has offered reconciliation and now mankind must have faith to accept his offer and be fully restored to God through the indwelling of his Spirit. The passage also talked about the role of those who have already been restored to God: to implore people on Christ's behalf to be reconciled themselves.

In this final part of the series, let's put everything together and summarize what is unique to the ideas of this series and the effect of these differences on how someone becomes a Christian and how someone lives as a Christian. From Part 8 of The Church series, these are the two factors that must align closely for one to be a member of a given church.

- I. The Effect of Universal Reconciliation of how one becomes a Christian
 - a. In many ways, it doesn't matter, and that's the point. If we call the opposite theology, one's sins are not forgiven until the point at which they become a Christian, "Contingent Reconciliation", then it is still the case that one isn't saved until they become a Christian. Therefore, under both theologies, one must become a Christian to be saved.
 - i. With Universal Reconciliation, one's sins are already forgiven because the source of condemnation, the Curse of the Garden and the Law, has been removed. Thus, the only sin that remains is the "unforgivable sin", the rejection of God's Spirit.
 - ii. With Contingent Reconciliation, one's sins are forgiven, and they receive the Holy Spirit at the same event, the point at which they become a Christian.
 - iii. One could say, "Isn't this precisely what Peter said in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"? I spoke in detail about this in Part 6 of the Era of the Spirit, "The First Gospel".
 1. The point I made was, "Yes, Peter likely believed as a Jew at the start of the Gospel, that a person must repent (recommit to the Law) to be forgiven and be baptized to receive the Spirit", but God meant, "Metanoia (be awakened to the new good news) that Law is fulfilled (i.e. your sins are forgiven) and be baptized to be

restored to God by his Indwelling Spirit.” This second meaning became evident to the Apostles as God worked miracles in Acts 6-10. This includes the miraculous appearance to Paul, who as a stringent adherent to the Law, understood the ramifications of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

2. This leads to the question, “How precisely are people sinning and having those sins charged or accounted for under the New Covenant?” As Rom 5:13 says, “sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law”.
- b. The effect, which many Christians have already realized, is that one’s reuniting with the Spirit of God should not be withheld until they have repented.
 - i. Firstly, this is because the Spirit is our source of sanctification, and justification is what we’re initially after.
 - ii. Secondly, the only sin charged against us *is our very separation from God*.
 - c. Should one’s restoration with God be held off for any reason? I believe the answer is yes in the case of *iniquity*. Thinking back to Part 5 of this series, there’s a table called, “The Spatial Cognates of Sin”, the Jews categorized sin in relation to public and private property.
 - i. A trespass is to cross into an area where you don’t belong, transgression is to willfully go there for a period, and iniquity is to go and live there. Does God recognize these categories? I don’t think so. But “living in sin” seems to indicate a lack of understanding and faith in the Gospel.
 - ii. It’s hard to say across the board at an individual level, but certainly someone with the attitude, “It’s not a sin” or “I’m forgiven so it doesn’t matter that I keep living the way I was”, has some misunderstanding of the Gospel. Again, the question is not, “Are the person’s sin forgiven or forgivable?”—they are. The question is, “Does the person have an understanding and faith in the Gospel to be reconciled with God?”
 - iii. It seems like things of the sexual nature can easily be an iniquity. Things like heterosexual out-of-marriage relations, homosexuality, and transgenderism come to mind. I would say addictions where the individual knows the addiction is damaging and hopes to be freed from it are more like a transgression.
- II. The Effect of Universal Reconciliation of how lives as a Christian
- a. As with becoming a Christian, in many ways it doesn’t influence how a Christian lives.
 - b. The effect, which many Christians have already realized, is that *one’s pursuit of holiness is not the primary concern of a disciple’s life*.
 - i. In many churches, however, holiness is the primary pursuit, and you can tell by their Sunday messages: they’re all people needing to stop sinning. The problem, as previously stated, is that the Spirit is our source of

sanctification. Therefore, preaching all the time that people are in sin and need to repent or they'll go to hell is putting the cart before the horse.

- ii. I believe the church should teach their members how to be one with God through the Spirit. This is not just a nice platitude, although one can only help someone to get close to the water, but they must drink it. Perhaps in this metaphor, the church's job is to teach members more efficient ways of drinking, as it were. But the physical quickly is overcome by the Spiritual. A disciple who has learned how to listen to the whisper of the Spirit becomes self-sufficient. As I said in Part 8 of the Church series, in many ways, a church is teaching its members how not to need church.
- c. Iniquity is still a big issue after a person has already become a Christian but is changing their lifestyle to a worldly one. There are several passages that speak about expelling a member. Churches tend to avoid this, understandably, but this is perhaps because the membership thinks the person is being expelled because they're not saved or because they don't deserve to be saved.
 - i. The truth is the opposite. Putting someone out of the church does not mean the church has deemed them unsaved. The church has no such authority. The church's authority and goal is the protection of the body and the encouragement of the individual to repent and be restored. In other words, the hope is that the removal is temporary.
 - ii. There are many passages about the church protecting the body and keep it pure: Mat 18:15-17 (Jesus' teaching on church discipline), Rom 16:17-18 (divisive people with doctrine contrary to the Gospel), 1Cor 5:1-13 (expelling immoral people who don't acknowledge sin), Titus 3:10-11 (dealing with divisive people with twisted ideas about the Law), 2Thes 3:6 and 14-15 (disassociation from people who are idle), and 2John 1:10-11 (do not welcome individuals spreading false doctrine).

Well, I hope you enjoyed this series on the nature of sin. Hopefully some things have been cleared up and maybe you've found some things you need to further understand about the Spirit of God.

I've thought about several topics for the next series, but since Christmas is approaching, I thought I'd do a shorter series on "The Dates of Christianity". I'll talk about when Jesus was probably born, the circumstances of his birth, and when Jesus was crucified (I know that's an Easter topic but I think it will fit here).

¹ Volition refers to actions or decisions made by an individual's own will or choice, indicating a conscious control over those actions or decisions. It is often associated with the cognitive process of deciding and committing to a particular course of action.