

Sequoyah Hills Presbyterian Church Knoxville, Tennessee

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Six Bad Words in the Bible: 3. Sin

We're considering "Bad Words in the Bible." The first was "doubt." Last week was "hypocrite." Today the word is "sin."

Romans 3:21-26

²¹But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

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You don't hear people use the word "sin" much anymore. If a lone gunman kills over 50 people in Las Vegas at a concert, he is mentally ill, but no one calls him a "sinner." People make mistakes, have problems, a lapse in judgment, are criminal, unethical or even immoral, but we don't use the word, "sin."

Wonder why that is? Do people not sin anymore?

In 1973, noted psychiatrist Karl Menninger wrote a book entitled, *Whatever Became of Sin?* He taught at Harvard Medical School before founding the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas. And he was a faithful Presbyterian!

Dr. Menninger discussed the tendency in psychiatry and society to do away with the concept of sin and to exonerate individuals of personal responsibility by shifting the blame for their bad behavior (sin) to others, i.e., to parents, circumstances and society.

(biblicalawakening.blogspot.com/2015/02/whatever-happened-to-sin/html/).

Menninger claimed, “we stopped sinning 25 years ago as a nation.” He writes;
The very word “sin,” which seems to have disappeared, was a proud word. It was once a strong word...but the word went away. It has almost disappeared, the word, along with the notion. Why? Doesn’t anyone sin anymore? (Menninger, Whatever Became of Sin? p.14)

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For years I went to The Masters golf tournament in Augusta, Georgia. Every year, standing at the entrance was a group of people with signs that read; “*The Wages of Sin are Death! Confess Your Sins and Repent! Jesus is Coming Soon!*” Sounds like a deal, but everyone just walked right pass them, including me. Who would want to join that group? They seemed so judgmental, so pious, so old school and outdated. I’m sure they were good people, but they were selling something no one wanted.

We Presbyterians must be a few of the crazy people left in the world who use the word “sin.” We have a *Prayer of Confession* at the very beginning of every worship service. We can’t get 3 minutes into it before we have to come clean with who we are. We did it again today;

*Gracious God, our sins are too heavy to carry,
too real to hide, and too deep to undo.*

So what do we mean when we use the word “sin?”

Typically, we mean behaviors. Sin is breaking the rules. We smoke, we drink, we dance, and we cuss. Gambling, taking the Lord’s name in vain, stealing, lying, cheating and adultery...they are all sins, by somebody’s definition.

There are sins we *commit* and sins we *omit*; things we did that we shouldn’t have done, and things we didn’t do that we should have done. But sin goes much deeper than behavior. The behavior is but a symptom. Sin begins in the will, the heart, the mind. It’s an attitude, a spirit of an undisciplined life, a life unconcerned with the will and ways of God.

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In the Creation account in *Genesis*, there is this “tree.” Whether it was an actual tree, or a metaphorical tree, this tree tells us a lot about ourselves. It is known as “*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*” (*Genesis 2:17*)

There is no such tree growing anywhere today. Or is there? The knowledge of good and evil is all knowledge. So to eat this fruit, so to speak, is to seek all knowledge. To seek all knowledge is to seek status with God. To seek status with God is egocentric. Our egocentricity is the core of all sin.

This is the Adam and Eve story. “*Don’t eat that fruit. You’ll die.*” You will cut yourself off from God by your own quest for self-aggrandizement. Your freedom is not meant to make you independent from God. Your freedom gives you the opportunity to

“glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” (The Book of Confessions, The Shorter Catechism, Q1, p.181). The choice is always yours.

The rest of the Bible is a story of generation after generation eating this fruit. *Sin* runs like kudzu through the stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses, the judges, the kings and prophets, the disciples and the early church. Everybody is eating this fruit!

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But the Bible is more than a diagnosis of our problem. It reveals a God who will not stop trying to restore us to our rightful place. We call this *“grace.”* It’s grace because it is undeserved.

Every story tainted by human sinfulness is covered with the story of God’s relentless grace. That’s what makes the Bible a sacred book. It tells a story of sin *and* forgiveness, despair *and* hope, brokenness *and* reconciliation, death *and* life.

The ultimate act of our sinful nature was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We ate **all** the fruit on that day and then hung him on **that** tree! That’s what **we** did. What **God** did was raise him from the dead. What God should have done was put all of humanity in that tomb. It should have been over, but it wasn’t. That’s grace!

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This is the message of the Church. This is our business. This *good news* is what we have to offer the world. It’s not about beating others up for their sin. It’s about proclaiming they are forgiven and free from it.

Lose the word *“sin”* and you lose the *“good news.”* Lose the *“good news”* and you leave humanity to muddle through their problems the best they can. If we aren’t sinners, then we don’t need a Savior. If we don’t need a Savior, I’m not sure why you would need a church. What would be the point?

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The mission of Jesus Christ was to save us from *sin*. We can’t let that go. He didn’t come to give us a bunch of rules to keep. He didn’t come to eradicate poverty or to eliminate homelessness, although those may be the result, if we were free from our sin. He didn’t come to heal everybody of all diseases or to run for President. He didn’t come to feed everybody or to distribute wealth equally among us.

Christ came to overcome our *sin*, to defeat it, once and for all. He came to get us away from that tree! Paul said it this way;

For there is no distinction, ²³since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (3:23-24)

What would the world look like if you took this tree out of it? Think of the things that would disappear if we stopped eating this fruit.

We would lose the *seven deadly sins; lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride*. Other things would disappear; *fraud, theft, lies, deceit, prejudice, discrimination, and even war*. Get rid of that tree and we are back in paradise!

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I wouldn't want to be associated with those people holding signs and shouting scripture passages at people going to a golf tournament. That's just not me. But we do share something in common with them. We are sinners. We do need a Savior.

Sin is a bad word in the Bible, but we can't afford to lose it. It tells us who we are, and God's grace tells us who we could be, and therein lies our hope!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Congregation:
Amen