

# Respectable Sins: Introduction

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, September 12th. It's good to see you all here this morning. And just as fall is usually our time when we begin ideas of new learning in school, I also timed our schedule, God timed it through me, so that we'd be starting a new sermon series today.

And so part of my preaching and planning process is that I'm always seeking God's guidance. I'm seeking his guidance for topics or themes or messages that we need to hear, that he has for us, or that we need to hear again.

And as part of my process, I also seek the input of the elders board, because this is not a solo journey. I seek their input, their insight, their feedback on what I am feeling led to preach.

And I've had a real conviction over the past year or so to preach a series on sin. And when I shared that with the elders, it was met with enthusiasm.

And even in one case, a comment from one of our leaders that said they had not heard preaching on the topic of sin since they were little.

[ 1 : 20 ] Is that a problem, do you think? They hadn't heard it in many years. And in conversations with people in our church and reflecting on my own life, hopefully you chuckle at the slide, sin seems to be a subject that is not that commonly addressed in the church.

Many churches. How can that be? How can that be? Does that seem odd to you? Because it really seems odd to me. Because the primary focus of the Christian life is what?

Salvation. Right? So it should seem like a simple equation. I've said many times, I'm bad at math, but it seems like a simple equation to me that if we require salvation, then there must be something that we need salvation from.

Right? Does that make sense? It seems simple. If we need to be saved from something, hopefully it's not too much of a stretch for us to recognize that as followers of Jesus, it was Jesus who came himself in the flesh as a man and died not only to save us, but all of humanity for all time from what? Sin, right? Seems obvious. So just a quick side note here. Knowing that this is going to be a huge topic, knowing that we are going to look at different chunks from week to week in different specific areas of challenge, and I won't necessarily cover every question you're going to have.

[ 3 : 10 ] You may, in fact, already be sitting there going, yeah, but... So this is what I'd love for you to do. I'm up to the task. So during the series, if there's a sermon, if there's something afterwards that strikes your mind that you think, yeah, but Pastor Ken, I'm wondering about such and such.

Anonymously, if you want. Put it on a slip of paper. Put it in the offering box, in the black box, and I will take it, and I will do homework, and at some point as we go on, I will aim to address questions people have.

And believe it or not, some of these I've already anticipated or tried to anticipate. So we'll get to some of those just naturally. But I want to make sure that as we go along, if you have questions, that we explore them.

Fair? So feel free to do that. Lots of you have my cell number. Text me. Send me an email. Drop something in there.

Send an email to Shaylin. Whatever works best for you, I will get it. I'll make sure I get it, and we'll take it from there. So I want to give you that opportunity. So either I will, as I said, cover it within a sermon, or as we go along, depending on, we may have no questions, which I hope won't be the case.

[ 4 : 32 ] But if we do have questions, I may take a time at the beginning or the end of a sermon and do that as a question feedback kind of section. So how does that sound? Is that okay?

Good. So I think, now I'm included, I think the topic of sin raises a lot of questions for people. And so maybe even for you personally, as I said, you may already be saying, yeah, but wait a minute.

And maybe the title threw you, Respectable Sins. Sin is respectable? Has he lost his marbles? We'll get there. There's a reason why it's called that, and we'll get there.

But for many churches, and maybe you've experienced this at churches that you've attended throughout your life, the topic of sin seems to rank right up there with money and sex on that highly uncomfortable list.

Is that fair? Does that seem familiar to you that that may have been the case? And that topic is either intentionally avoided or it's certainly sidelined in that quest to become friendly and welcoming, right?

[ 5 : 42 ] If we get too convicty, Connor teases me sometimes and says, ooh, that was pretty convicty, Dad. But that's part of the Christian journey, right? Is that we do need to have the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

We do need to hold one another accountable. We do need to recognize our sin nature as humans. So the topic is often avoided, and rather than being challenged by it and even convicted by it, lots of churches will dodge it altogether because it's the S word.

It's the other S word, I guess. But over the next several weeks, we're going to dig into the topic of sin, and not as a way to make you feel really guilty.

That's not what I'm after. I don't want to make you feel really guilty between now and Advent so that by the time we get to Advent, you go, oh, it's almost Christmas. We made it, right?

The point of this is going to be that we're going to look at the perspectives on sin that we commit in our lives that we may tend to minimize. We may tend to even discount it.

[ 6 : 52 ] And that's why our series is titled Respectable Sins. How can sin be seen as respectable ever? Well, there are things that we do, my good friends, that throughout this series, we're going to look at them, and you're going to recognize, yikes, I do that, or I have a tendency towards that, and it's sin.

And we're going to look at these things, and we're going to talk about how we can reorient and refocus back on God to recognize the direction that we need to be going.

So we're beginning our series this morning with an introduction. You're probably thinking, I thought that was the introduction. Well, we're going to focus this morning on three main questions. What is sin?

Anyway, what is it? Is sin really that big a deal? And what do we do next? What is sin?

Is it really that big a deal? And what do we do next? So let's begin with that first question. What is sin anyway? When you think of the idea of sin, what are some of the ideas or words that come to mind?

[ 8 : 05 ] And we don't have to get graphic or too detailed or too specific, but just shout out some words to me. What are some ideas that come to mind when you hear the word sin? Murder. Ooh.

Guilt. Stealing. Okay. Adultery. Everyone's going, digging into the top 10. Oh, Len, did you cheat? You looked ahead. Everybody hear that? Len said missing the mark. Any other thoughts? Worry. Lying.

Ah, the 10 commandments. Yes, the top 10. So when you hear the word sin, here we are, do you immediately think of Christianity's infamous top 10 list?

The 10 commandments. That's what we, many of the ones that we just heard now called out are from, obviously, right? Or do you think of the idea of the seven deadly sins?

[ 9 : 06 ] And those are often connected to Catholicism. Sometimes they're referred to as capital sins or capital vices. And that group includes pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth.

And if sloth isn't that familiar, laziness. So we will touch on some of those often respectable sins as well as others during this series. And so I think it's helpful to start with a clear definition of the word sin.

The word sin, maybe this is familiar to some of you, but certainly for churches, the word sin, and even for society as a whole at one point, believe it or not, sin used to be a serious topic.

It used to be one that was addressed boldly and without fear. It was appropriately considered to have eternal consequences. And maybe for some of you, you're thinking, sheesh, that wasn't that long ago.

And that's what I got thinking. It doesn't feel like that long ago when that word and all the implications of it were a big deal. Puritan church leaders in the 17th century were deeply concerned about their own sin.

[10:31] So we're talking about pastors and leaders and people like that. They wrote books with titles like *The Sinfulness of Sin*, *The Mischief of Sin*, *The Anatomy of Secret Sins*, and *The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin*.

A little bit redundant, right? But at the same time, it shows you the depth and weight that that topic held for them. And no, I didn't make any of those titles up. They're actual titles of books from that period.

Addressing sin, friends, used to be a priority for the church. It used to be a front and center issue. But in many ways, as I've said before, it seems to have become some sort of a taboo subject. And for all the wrong reasons. We wear seatbelts, recognizing that when we drive a car, there's a real possibility of getting into a crash, right?

Most buildings have emergency exits in case something goes wrong and we need a safe way out. There likely isn't a single area of your life that involves risk or danger or potentially serious consequences where you don't take precautions.

[11:51] Can you recognize that? And yet, for some reason, when it comes to sin, the most serious issue that humanity faces, potentially in every moment and every area of their lives, we seem to skirt the topic like the plague, don't we?

The word sin itself. I often wonder, as I've said in the past about other words, if we can even wrap our heads fully around what it means. And in some ways, doesn't it feel like an archaic term? Does your brain say that a little bit? Well, sin, I don't know. Or is it, at the very least, does it feel to you like it's too critical? Too harsh?

Too judgmental, perhaps? I think we can also recognize in a tendency in popular culture to frame the idea of sin and that word as being somehow playful, right?

Naughty. Even enticing. Oh, that's sinfully good. We hear that all the time, right? But for Christians, sin can be defined, as one definition I found puts it, as any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.

[13:17] Any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature. Boy, that's pretty comprehensive, isn't it? It's a short definition, but it covers all the bases.

And I believe that it accurately captures just how pervasive sin can be in every aspect of our lives. Len cheated because he said this already, but so reflecting back on what Len said, Len said sin is, it may be defined as missing the mark, right?

And you may remember that in the past I have expressed that idea of sin through the Greek word *hamartia*. And that's literally what it means, is it was used in archery.

And it literally means missing the mark. And that came to be connected with the idea of sin. So that's another helpful perspective on it, I think. As theologian Wayne Grudem says, sin includes not only individual acts, such as stealing or lying or committing murder, but also attitudes that are contrary to the attitudes that God requires of us.

Do you see that? I think we may tend to limit it to sin or not sinning is just flicking a switch. Oh, I didn't do it. But it's about your attitude as well.

[14:43] It's about your attitude being contrary to the attitude that God wants for you. So we can recognize there then that sin can be reflected in our actions, absolutely, but also in our attitudes and even in our moral nature.

That's the internal character of who we are as individuals. One commentator I read suggested that at its root, sin is essentially selfish disregard.

Do you hear that? Sin is essentially selfish disregard choosing what we want over anything else. Seeking to fulfill our selfish desires over the needs of another person or even worse, over the will of God in our lives, what he's calling us to do.

So I think we can all recognize that human beings are prone to sin. Not only that, but maybe you can see this as well.

We are attracted to it. We are tempted by it. And all those factors are part of our nature. And even as Christians, ready to be shocked, we are still sinners.

[16:05] Do you recognize that? What's your reaction as you hear me say that this morning? Is it along the lines maybe of, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute, Pastor Kent.

I am not a sinner. I accepted Jesus. Jesus died for my sins. I'm not a sinner. Wrong. That's not what the Bible says at all.

Jesus paid for your sin, but it doesn't mean you stopped doing it. So what I said there is true. The second and third part are true. Jesus died for you to pay for your sin. But our sinful nature remains. We are still sinners. We're saved by the sacrifice, hallelujah, of Jesus on the cross and God's amazing grace that has been extended to us. Jesus' death paid the price for our sin and in fact, pays it in an ongoing and active way for all time. [17:10] Friends, when we recognize Jesus Christ as the Son of God and declare Him as Lord over our lives, we stand before God covered by Jesus.

God sees Jesus, not us. God sees the grace of sacrifice in Jesus that covers our sin. We sing about it, but it is absolutely, literally true.

We stand before God as children who are inherently sinful, but who have been redeemed.

Speaking of people having questions, slight sidetrack, I already received a few before, even before we began.

It's awesome. So to close out this first little section, I want to take a moment to recognize what one question folks might have because somebody did. Are there degrees of sin?

Are there some sins that are in some way worse than others? And it's funny because when I hear that, I start to think of, is that finding my, and this isn't of the person, but I'm just thinking in general, when we ask that, it's, where's my loophole here?

[18:30] If I didn't do that one, am I still okay? Well, while the Catholic Church makes a distinction, they make a distinction between mortal sins that are extremely serious by their estimation and venial sins.

Maybe you've heard those two terms. Mortal sins are a big deal. Venial sins are less severe. So, but friends, the Protestant Church doesn't necessarily make that distinction on the degrees of sin. So I want to be clear that for God, and I've done some homework here, for God, sin is sin. It's ultimately all offensive to him.

It's ultimately all punishable by death without the sacrifice of Jesus. Sin is sin. So for the most part, sin is not generally ranked.

Things are not seen as more or less offensive to God. So let's dig into an example here. So while being angry at someone, and we're going to get to anger down the road, while being angry with someone may seem much less serious than murdering them, where does the root of murder begin?

[19:58] Right? If you are angry enough to murder someone, that took root somewhere. and so that makes sense.

Can we recognize that a sin of selfish anger can serve as the root cause that could ultimately lead to murder? And in terms of lust and sexual sin, the Bible is clear, crystal clear, that even thinking about an act is essentially equivalent to having acted on the impulse.

Does that make sense? Yes. So hopefully, that very brief examine exploration, you're probably not thinking it was that brief, reminds you of the nature of sin.

So we get to our second question this morning. Is sin really that big a deal? We don't talk about it. Is it that big a deal?

Isn't it old-fashioned? Isn't it kind of irrelevant these days? Well, or do you think, isn't there a handful of really, really bad stuff that I'm just not going to do, that I shouldn't do, and as long as I stay away from that, I'm pretty much okay, right?

[21:18] No one's challenging me on these statements. Isn't sin just the reality of being human? I mean, we're all forgiven anyway, right? So, what's the big deal?

Can't we recognize sin as being character flaws or things that we can't really do that much about? It's just how I'm wired. Have you ever heard anybody say that? Can't we just move on?

Like, do we need to? Stuff I do is pretty minor, right? So, most folks wouldn't even judge me for it. So, it's kind of respectable sin, really, like everybody does it.

Friends, do you hear the voice of the world in there? Do you hear the idea of shirking or minimizing responsibility?

Deflecting blame? Seeking to water down a state of mind, a state of heart, potentially even a state of character that separates us from God?

[22:22] I think it's important to hear that. In his 1973 book, it's only slightly younger than me, older than me?

I don't know. In his book, Whatever Became of Sin, psychiatrist Dr. Carl Menninger wrote, The very word sin, which seems to have disappeared, was once a proud word.

It was once a strong word, and an ominous and serious word, but the word went away. It has almost disappeared, the word along with the notion.

Why? Doesn't anyone sin anymore? doesn't anyone believe in sin? 1973. That's a long time ago. That was already on people's radar. C.S. Lewis once noted, The barrier I have met is the almost total absence from the minds of my audience of a sense of sin.

[ 23 : 31 ] In 2001, New Testament scholar D.A. Carson, maybe you've heard of him, he's awesome, commented that the most frustrating aspect of doing evangelism in universities is that students generally have no idea of sin.

Carson said, they know how to sin well enough, but they have no idea of what constitutes sin. How important is the issue of sin?

Well, let's see what the Bible has to say about it. According to my research, the word sin is mentioned in the Bible at least, hold on to your hats, 400 times.

400 times. And while that number varies somewhat depending on the translation, it seems to never be less than 400.

sin, and the Bible also mentions different types of sin, so that count may actually be higher. So I think we can agree then, based on that, to say the least, that the Bible considers sin to be a serious topic that needs to be addressed.

[ 24 : 50 ] Is that fair? And while some pastors and some churches may skirt the issue of sin, the Bible is extremely clear on it.

So let's look at just a few key verses. We're not going to look at all 400 this morning. In Romans 3, verse 23, it won't surprise you if you think in terms of evangelism and the idea of the Roman road, you may have heard of that, leading someone to Jesus, telling someone about salvation.

Often, the book of Romans is used as a model, and digging deeper is going to study the book of Romans, coming up soon. So one of my favorite books. So anyway, sidetrack.

Romans 3, 23, Paul says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All my friends, that includes you and that includes me.

Paul doesn't say for some, he says for all. In Romans 6, verse 23, Paul again says, for the wages of sin is death.

[ 26 : 04 ] But the gift of God is, maybe you have to say it because I can't, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Grace greater than all our sin. Amen. In Romans 10, verse 9, Paul again says, if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, what?

You will be saved. Friends, sin isn't something that we can brush off or minimize. It has serious and eternal consequences.

But thankfully, we recognize that our sin can be and will be forgiven by God. But only one way. By confessing our sin.

By receiving forgiveness that was only made possible through the death of Jesus on the cross. Friends, God hates sin.

[ 27 : 18 ] sin. He hates it. And we can see that play out over and over through the Bible. We can't go into detailed examples of it in the interest of time.

But you know some of the verses. You know some of the circumstances and situations. Sodom and Gomorrah, for example. But do you know why God hates sin so much?

Have you ever thought of that? Yeah, I know he hates it. I don't know why. I think it's bad. Well, God hates sin because it blinds us to the truth.

It separates us from God and it also separates us from healthy community with other people, other believers. Why do you think Satan loves sin so much?

Because it breaks relationship. It severs connections. It causes damage and wreaks havoc. God also hates sin.

[ 28 : 22 ] Why? Because he is holy. God is sinless. God is righteous. So sin is the exact opposite to everything God represents.

Can you recognize that? Sin is entirely incompatible with. It's in full rebellion against God.

Psalms 5 verse 4 tells us, you are not a God who takes pleasure in evil. With you the wicked cannot dwell.

Incompatible with God. Do you remember in the past that we've reflected on the use of repetition in the Bible to reflect importance, to reflect significance or emphasis?

Well, just how holy is God? Isaiah 6 verse 3, you know this, declares, holy, holy, holy, threefold is the Lord God almighty.

[ 29 : 34 ] The whole earth, I'd argue all of creation, is full of his glory. So we come to our third point this morning.

Having reflected and refreshed our perspective on what sin is and why it's a big deal, what do we do next? Well, we need to recognize that holiness is not just a characteristic of God.

That's not where it stops. God is calling his people to holiness as well. Can you recognize that? We read in the Old Testament in Leviticus 11 verse 45, I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God.

Therefore, remember what he says there, be holy. holy because I am holy. The third book of the Old Testament is as relevant for us today as the children of God as it was then.

1 Peter chapter 1 verses 13 to 15 echoes this as well. Therefore, prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled, set your hope fully on the grace to be given to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[ 31 : 05 ] Hear this, as obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

For it is written, and Peter's reflecting to Leviticus, be holy because I am holy. We recognize that part of God's holiness means that he is what?

He is set apart. He is different. He is unique. And as his people, my friends, he calls us to be that as well.

Holiness. Wow. If God is holy, how can I possibly attain that goal? Friends, through Jesus, who is tempted himself, but scripture tells us he did not sin.

God understands the human struggle of temptation and sin. He gets it. We're not expected to conquer sin on our own.

[ 32 : 25 ] Could you imagine if that was our lot in life? As we read in Hebrews 4 verse 15, speaking of Jesus here, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.

Jesus sacrificed for us. He advocates for us actively, even now, before God. He stands with us. We are not in this alone. God is not to recognize that holiness is not somehow an unattainable standard that we're expected to achieve on our own and doomed to fail.

Do you feel that? Do you ever feel that in your life? I just can't do it. I can't do it. I can't even try.

Well, striving for holiness, my friends, is part of our ongoing journey as Christians.

It needs to be a priority in our lives as we continue this journey. We're not done. Scripture tells us over and over this journey continues, the race set before us.

[ 33 : 50 ] So to use a heavy theological word that you've all probably heard before, this ongoing process of pursuing holiness and being set apart is called what?

Any guesses? Vern. Trust another guy who's been to seminary. Sanctification. Sanctification is the process of being freed or purified from sin.

But it's also important to remember that yes, it is God working this process. It is the Holy Spirit within us convicting us and strengthening us.

But sanctification, friends, is not a passive process. It's not something where we sit by as God does his thing, he does God things, to make us more holy.

I'm just going to sit here until God is done. Nope. Friends, we are accountable. Hear that word account again? Over and over through the parables of Jesus, that series, we recognize the idea of being accountable.

[ 35 : 01 ] The idea of being responsible for something we've been given, something we've been called to. And in this case, we're recognizing we are accountable for, we are responsible for our sin.

So you may have noticed over time that the Bible uses the concept of darkness to represent evil, to represent sin, right?

Things that are opposed to God and his character. burning bush. And we also recognize that light, as the opposite, is used to represent the nature and character of God.

Burning bush. It's not a coincidence. The direction and path that we should follow as children of God is a path of light, not darkness.

1 John 1 verses 5 to 7 summarizes this so beautifully for us. It says, this is the message we've heard from him and declare to you.

[ 36 : 04 ] God is what? Light. In him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship, here's the conviction part, if we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, what a great opportunity that is, and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.

Friends, we are called to walk in the light of God, but we do not walk there alone. We do not seek to find that path of lightness on our own.

So now that we have reminded ourselves about what sin is, why it is a big deal, third question, and it is a short one, what do we do next? Well, Philippians 2 verses 12 and 13, Paul again, Philippians 2 12 and 13, Paul writes, therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, when he is watching, he is implying, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation.

There is that Paul phrase, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his purpose.

[ 37 : 44 ] What Paul is saying to us there is that holiness and resisting temptation take work, work. Not to suggest in any way that our salvation is based solely on having to work for it.

Works-based salvation is not what I'm saying. But we do need to strive after that standard, that standard of holiness that Jesus set for us.

Because remember that our sin separates us from God and separates us from other people. And that fear and trembling that Paul uses there is not to suggest that we're to be so afraid of God that we're paralyzed in fear, right?

But that we take the nature of God, we take the value of our salvation, the reality and potential consequences of our sin seriously, right?

We take them seriously. Friends, I want to close this morning with some direct words of encouragement. A secret to the Christian life.

[ 38 : 52 ] Here it is. God has not left us alone. He's not left us alone in our struggles to do his will. He's not left us alone in our attempts to resist temptation.

He's not left us alone in seeking forgiveness for our sin. God wants to come alongside us. He wants to be and is within us through the power of the Holy Spirit to help us.

Can you recognize that? As strange as this will sound, God will help us to want to obey him. He will give us the power to do what he wants.

But we're also called to be active participants in that process as well. We are called to seek his will. We are called to follow his leading and his prompting in our lives.

We're called to seek to resist temptation, to confess and to repent, which as we remember means do differently after, right? Turn away from our sinful habits and choices.

[ 40 : 02 ] The secret to a changed life is to submit, this is going to sound so obvious, but it's so important. The secret to a changed life is to submit to God's control in and over your life.

Let him work. It may sound strange, but try asking God to help you. Ask him to help you to want to do his will.

The will of God is not always easy in our lives. Ask him for the power to make you lean into him more, to give into his will, to, as I said, allow him to work.

In the coming weeks, we're going to look at specific areas of sin that we may tend to minimize or we may tend to discount. And as we call these things out, both as a community of people and as individuals who seek to follow God and honor him in this place, we do that together.

as we journey through a deeper exploration of some respectable sins, we're also going to remember the life-giving words of 1 John 1, 9.

[ 41 : 21 ] I bet you all have it memorized, mostly. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us.

Some translations say cleanse. Cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Amen? Amen.