

Respectable Sins: Selfishness

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, October 10th, and happy Thanksgiving weekend. Well, there's no question this is still a challenging time of considering risk and the health and safety of both ourselves and others as we crave gathering with friends and family, crave sharing the holiday together.

I know for our family, it still seems odd that, very odd, that we will not gather around a big table. Michelle has a huge family. I have a big family on my side, extended family.

So to not be able to gather in that way for food and fellowship and laughs, believe it or not, our family likes to laugh, but that's the reality of our world right now, isn't it?

And I believe that one day we will be able to gather again. I have faith that will happen, even if it winds up looking somewhat different. I believe that will come again.

God's blessings and protection on all of you, my friends, as you celebrate Thanksgiving in whatever way that looks like this weekend. This morning, as we continue in our series called Respectable Sins, let's refresh a few of the things we've considered so far.

[1 : 19] I don't know about you, but I remember not that long ago being a person in a pew, and I would forget things from week to week, so a little recap doesn't usually hurt. If you'd like a note sheet, my lovely assistant Connor, as always, will bring those around.

So just put your hand up if you'd like one. Over the past few weeks, we've had a review of the concept of sin. We've begun to look at specific sins, including worry and discontentment, and last week we looked at the sin of pride.

So remember, if you've missed any of these in the series, those and other sermons are available on the website, are available through our podcast, which is Bramarchast, that you can find.

I continually find people still who say, your church has a podcast? Yep, check it out. So it's a great way for people to be able to hear sermons on the move if they've got an iPhone or things like that. So as we've explored this concept together, we've considered the idea of sin, even the word itself, has become watered down, really, and often even completely sidelined by the world.

[2 : 31] Even many churches and preachers walk around the topic. And so we recognize that the reality of sin must be a central focus for us as followers of Jesus.

We've also recognized, by one quote, that sin does not only include individual acts, such as stealing or lying or committing murder, but it also includes attitudes that are contrary to the attitudes that God requires of us.

One commentator suggested that at its root, sin is essentially selfish disregard. It's choosing what we want over anything else, seeking to fulfill our selfish desires over the needs of another person or over the will of God in our lives.

Sin is a serious issue for God because it represents things that are completely contrary to his holy nature. But we need to recognize that holy nature is not just a characteristic of God.

It is something that we are called to as his people. We are called to holiness by a holy God. So as we can continue in our series over the coming weeks, we're going to continue looking at some of the specific sins we may commit.

[3 : 56] And we're going to explore ways to identify and to address them. And if it's helpful to think of it this way, I've said before, respectable sins, you might still be wrapping your head around, whoa, wait a minute, that doesn't make sense.

Respectable sins are the ones we may tend to minimize. We may tend to disregard or at the very least, tolerate. Isaiah 3, or sorry, Isaiah 5, verse 20 says, Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet bitter.

This verse struck me this week because it's an important cautionary message. It reminds us to be aware of minimizing sin in our lives, convincing ourselves that what we're doing that is sinful is actually okay.

It reminds us to be aware of how we might be minimizing or making excuses for sinful actions.

Because, friends, when we blur those lines between right and wrong, which are very clear, particularly when God's word is a standard for morality and righteous behavior in our lives, we're headed down a very, very slippery slope.

So I hope you're beginning to recognize over the series that some of these little sins, that we might tend to define them that way, some of these little sins that are lurking in your life, call them out.

[5 : 37] Confess them to God before they spin out of control. I think it's fitting that as we're hopefully in a Thanksgiving state of mind this weekend, we consider the sin of selfishness this morning.

We recognize that the little sin of disobedience to God that we see in Genesis with Adam and Eve, their little disobedience quickly spreads to the point where the disobedience and selfishness of their children leads to murder.

One generation separated. We read in Scripture that Adam and Eve's son Cain is so overcome with selfishness and envy over his brother Abel that he murders him.

Not only that, but we recognize in Genesis 4 verse 9 that when God confronts him about what he's done, Cain does what? He minimizes it.

He seeks to dodge blame and responsibility. Genesis 4 verse 9 says, Then the Lord said to Cain, Where is your brother Abel? God knows where he is.

[6 : 56] I don't know, Cain replies. Am I my brother's keeper? The arrogance, right? To say that to God when God knows exactly what he's done.

So we see that from the beginning, that selfishness develops deep roots in humanity. And those roots continue to draw us away from God and make everything about us.

Selfishness. It's such a convicting topic that I want to use another quick story this morning. A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, five, and Ryan, three.

The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake, right? That's what kids do. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. Boys, she said, If Jesus were sitting here, he would say, Let my brother have the first pancake.

I can wait. Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, Ryan, you be Jesus. Funny but true, right?

[8 : 10] As we consider the sin of selfishness this morning, I think this story reveals something very powerful to us. Selfishness, pardon me, actually has to be untrained from us.

Can you recognize that? It has to be intentionally deprogrammed from our default behaviors as children. Perhaps you can remember your inherent selfish behavior as a child.

As human beings, our default is not to share, not to play well with others, not to want to be part of a team, not to live in harmony in a community.

We want what we want. Isn't that fascinating? But it's also a very deep revelation of just how hardwired into our nature it is to be selfish.

We're going to consider three things this morning as we explore the sin of selfishness. I've come to learn over the past few months that Brammer is a three-point sermon church, and Gertie will be happy.

[9 : 20] Amen, says Gertie. So I have said to people, the three-point sermon has its place. However, it's not always the best format.

I am quite happy to, I won't always, it's not my promise, I will not always stick to the three-pointers, but three or four I think is good because it gives you digestible chunks that you can take away with you.

And hopefully the note sheets help as well. So we're going to consider three things this morning. We're going to consider the symptoms of selfishness. I love alliteration. The significance of selfishness.

And the solution to selfishness. So first, what are the symptoms of selfishness? I have a question for you this morning.

This is rhetorical, nobody panic. Would you consider yourself to be a selfish person? I'm avoiding making eye contact with people intentionally.

[10:21] I want anyone to feel bad on Thanksgiving. Or if someone who knows you were asked, would they say that you tend to be selfish? I believe that's an important filter to keep in mind.

Michelle has said to me at times, I'm not always the best sharer. Does that make me selfish? Kinda. So what are the tendencies?

What are the behaviors, the attitudes, or perspectives that should be red flags for us in our lives?

Well, do you want your own way? If you're spending time with someone or making plans, would you rather ultimately do what you want to do?

Yeah, I'll hang out with you, but I'd rather not do any of that stuff. Do you generally seek to satisfy your own needs before someone else's?

Sometimes I believe we can recognize selfishness in that way. When we begin to admit that we want the first, the last, the best, right?

[11:29] In the King James translation, Matthew 6, 33, this jumped into my head this week as I was preparing. King James translation, Matthew 6, verse 33 says, you know it, seek ye first the kingdom of God.

But do you actually hear, seek me first? Is that the way you feel in your life? I believe that selfish behavior truly reflects the attitude of the world.

We can hear this, right? It is, and I've said this before, it is everyone for themselves. If you don't stand up for yourself, if you're not able to take what you want before someone else beats you to it, then you are somehow a failure.

Do you recognize that? That language, that narrative in our world? So just as worry reveals a false sense of responsibility to provide for, or to anticipate an unknown future, selfishness seeks to hoard whatever we can, to provide for ourselves over anyone else.

Can you see how foreign that concept is, that attitude, that perspective is, to our calling as the Bible outlines it for us? Can you recognize symptoms of selfishness in your own life?

[13:02] Our second point this morning, what is the significance of selfishness? I mean, honestly, isn't selfishness just looking out for ourselves to ensure that our needs are met?

Is a tendency to be selfish really something that you need to worry that much about? Respectable sins, my friends. Selfishness is significant because it speaks to, just like worry does, a lack of trust. It speaks to a lack of trust that God will provide, that other people will care for us, will put us before themselves. So that we don't have to put ourselves first all the time.

Selfishness is significant because it speaks to a lack, as well, of consideration for others. It reflects that our priorities and our perspectives are out of whack, and that they have turned, not surprisingly, in words.

Just as with every other kind of sin that we're going to be exploring in this series, we shouldn't at all be surprised that the Bible has a great deal to say about selfishness.

[14:23] Proverbs 18, I love the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 18, verse 1 tells us, an unfriendly man pursues selfish ends. He defies all sound judgment.

Proverbs 21, verse 13 says, if a man shuts his ears to the cries of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.

Proverbs 28, verse 27 says, he who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them will receive many curses.

Shuts his ears, closes his eyes. Do you hear that? In Luke 6, verses 32 to 34, Jesus calls us to something radical when he says, if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?

Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you?

[15:36] Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. You see that? No grace. Jesus says, but love your enemies.

Here's the radical part. Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting anything back. And this is not lend to your Christian friends, your Christian neighbors, your next door neighbor.

This is to strangers. Jesus says, then your reward will be great. And you will be sons of the Most High because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. So instead of demanding or protecting our rights, defending our personal sense of entitlement, Jesus calls us to let go of these things.

He calls us to trust in God's provision and protection and to intentionally care for others. I believe that selfishness and selfish behavior comes directly out of losing your personal sense of identity. [16:56] And I'll explain that. We're all created by God. Hope we can agree. We are all equal in his eyes.

We're all equally deserving of God's grace. Hallelujah. Thanks for that. We are all sinners who give in to our own self-interested nature at times.

And we all need forgiveness. The playing field, my friends, is completely level. While we're all individuals and our identity in Christ, our relationship with God is the same.

No matter what our circumstances are, our relationship with God, his love for us, his desire to have relationship with us does not change.

And so part of that identity, part of that correct orientation in our relationship with God calls us to put others before ourselves.

[17:59] Not second, but first. First. First Corinthians 10, verse 24 says, nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

We're called to consider the needs and the challenges of others before our own needs. Galatians 6, verse 2 tells us we are to carry each other's burdens.

and in that way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Friends, we're not on this journey alone. I have said this before.

Reach out for help when you need it. Willingly offer your help to other people as well. Ephesians 5, verse 21 tells us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

As followers of Christ, we are called to choose selflessness over selfishness. Our third point this morning, what is the solution to selfishness?

[19:17] We love simple solutions, don't we? Even if we're facing a complex situation or circumstances, we prefer the quick answer.

Yeah, yeah, get to the point, get to the point. Yeah, I just need to, yep, yeah, just give me the answer. Can you recognize that God has actually given us two answers that are the solution to not only selfishness, but also other areas of sin in our lives?

One is great, I'm giving you hints, one is great, and the other is golden. The commandment and the rule.

The second part of the great commandment is found in Matthew 22, verse 39, where we read, Jesus tells us to love your neighbor as yourself.

Not love yourself, then get around to loving your neighbor with whatever you have left over, whatever you feel like, whatever's left of your resources, your second best, but love them first.

[20:27] Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. That's the answer. So if we truly love God, then loving our neighbor should flow naturally.

It should flow naturally out of that love for God. With the same commitment, the same dedication, that same selflessness. And the golden rule, by the way, is not the person with the gold makes the rules.

You've heard that before. The golden rule is found in Matthew 7, 12, where Jesus says, so in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.

For this sums up the law and the prophets. The golden rule. If you don't know scripture, you don't know Jesus, you know the golden rule.

You hear people say it often. Bernard Rimland is the director of the Institute for Child Behavior Research. And he conducted a fascinating study in the principle of the golden rule.

[21:40] Rimland found that the happiest people, quoting here, the happiest people are those who help others. Each person involved in the study was asked to list ten people they knew best and to label them as happy or not happy.

Then they were asked to go through that list again and label each person as either selfish or unselfish using the following definition of selfishness.

Here's the definition. A stable tendency to devote one's time and resources to one's own interests and welfare and an unwillingness to inconvenience oneself for others.

There's selfishness. So in categorizing the results of this study, Rimland found that all the people labeled happy were also labeled unselfish.

He wrote that, quote, those whose activities are devoted to bringing themselves happiness are far less likely to be happy.

[22 : 51] And those whose efforts are devoted to making others happy. Sorry, I got that twisted around. He wrote that those whose activities are devoted to bringing themselves happiness are far less likely to be happy than those whose efforts are devoted to making others happy.

Remlin concluded in his study, Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Friends, the great commandment and the golden rule, they outline what the correct perspective and orientation of our lives should be. They model active goodness, active mercy and care towards others.

Just as God shows towards us. So as we prepare to close our time together today, how do we correct selfishness in our lives?

Well, Philippians 2 verse 21 shines a powerful light on the human tendency towards self-interest. Because it says, For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 09] So Paul, in the letter to the Philippians, is calling out Christians. Calling out believers who are saying, Folks, I recognize your default is to look out for yourself first.

Not the interests of Jesus. So friends, with that challenge, with that flag for us, Don't become so preoccupied with your own needs or interests that they crowd out your calling to serve and love others.

You can also correct selfishness in your life by asking God to convict you when it's happening. He will. If you can be brave enough to ask him, Ask him, Father, show me when I'm putting someone else second or last.

Ask him to reveal to you ways in which selfishness shows up in your life. Because friends, once you begin to recognize the patterns, you can, through the power of God, through God's grace, begin to correct them.

Begin to repent, right? Choose a different path. Choose to do differently after. So instead of selfishly seeking what you want, submit to God and ask him what you really need.

[25 : 33] Practice selflessness. Some ways, letting someone else have the best part of your day and your talents, not the leftovers at the end.

Let them have the last word. The biggest piece. The first choice. Or the last one.

Philippians 2, verse 3 and 4 reminds us to have the correct perspective as we serve as well. When it says, Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Jesus gave us such a model. But in humility, consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

My friends, seek to put others first in every situation. Trust that God will take care of you. Be grateful.

[26 : 38] Be thankful for everything he provides. Ask God to make you content. Ask him to change your perspective and your heart from a me first one to one that always seeks others first.

Ask him to give you a heart as well that is truly thankful for and satisfied by what you have been given. May we seek to be people for whom every day, not just this weekend, is a day of thanksgiving to God.

As we journey through the deeper exploration of some of these respectable sins together over the coming weeks, I've wanted us to say the words of 1 John 1-9 together each week.

You ready? If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Amen.