

Does Sin Matter?

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[0 : 00] Does sin matter? And I guess he's primarily speaking to those who have already come to Jesus. But whatever he says to them, he's also saying to the world at large.

By talking about sin, he's automatically recognizing that our sin has separated us from God. That's a great problem between us and God.

And that's why he begins, he goes all the way back to the beginning of the world in chapter 5 verse 18. And he speaks about how Adam chose to go his own way.

And therefore, there came a separation between the world and God. So that mankind, humankind, came to be dead and lost in trespasses and sins.

Condemned by God. And when God gave them his law, his own people, his law, in verse 20, we saw how last week, like the tractor in the mud. It only served to make things ten times worse.

[1 : 04] The law, in a sinful heart, it only makes that person worse. Because it provokes that person to sin. And it only defines and clarifies what he's doing already.

And he drives it home. The law drives home to that person how condemned that person is. And yet, despite that, Paul's note as he closes the fifth chapter, so that as sin reigned in death, grace might also reign through righteousness leading to our eternal life.

Remember how last week we saw that God was utterly determined that whatever the corruption and the darkness of our sin, God was determined to save us from our sin by the only means that was possible to do so, which was the sending of his own son into the world to die for sin.

So that as sin abounded, grace also abounded. The more we became steeped in sin, the more determined God was to save and to reach people and to send his own son into the world to rescue us from sin.

Here's the question then that follows up from that, at least in the minds of some. I guess Paul must have heard people saying this as they came to know this for the very first time.

[2 : 37] Because to the Jewish mind, what Paul was saying was something completely new. They had never come across this before. Because for them, they believed that to be right with God, like I said last week, was keeping God's law.

So the very idea that somehow there might be another way was strange to them. They'd never confronted it before. And so as they came across this whole idea of God and his grace towards them, that the only way that they could be saved from sin was by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

They said this, well, if that's the case, then logically, should we therefore continue to sin so that grace may abound even more?

If what you're saying is true, and if the more we sin, the more determined God is to save and to forgive and to cleanse, then why should we not just carry on sinning?

Because the more we carry on sinning, even as Christians, then the more God is going to carry on saving and forgiving and cleansing. Isn't that the case? And the whole thing doesn't make sense, they were saying.

[3 : 51] I mean, what you're saying then is that you're actually giving people a green light to carry on sinning. What they were saying is, what our message is, you have to keep God's law.

Well, you have to try your best to observe the Ten Commandments. That way, although we do fail from time to time, that way, at least we're trying to keep God's law.

But your way, they were saying, your way, Paul, is to say, well, it doesn't really matter if you sin because God's grace covers our sin no matter what.

So let's carry on so that grace may abound. So I think you can understand that Paul wants to stop at this point. It's a very important question.

Is it true? What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

[4 : 52] Does sin matter? Or is it the opposite? Is my life to be, just to consist of a life of sin so that God will forgive me?

Now, I guess it comes down to this on a day-by-day level. Even if you've never thought in those terms before, the chances are you've thought in these terms. When you're tempted, and we're all tempted from time to time to sin, more often than not.

When you're tempted to do something or to say something that you know is wrong, how often does that voice come into your head, well, God's going to forgive you anyway.

And as a result of that, you just go for it. Even though you know that it's the wrong course of action, there's that voice in your head that comes in and says, well, the gospel says that we're saved by grace, God's grace is endless, therefore you just go and do what you're tempted to do.

And I would challenge you tonight, there's not a single person here tonight that hasn't entertained that thought. Including me, including everyone, we've entertained that thought.

[6 : 17] That's what Paul is saying. And so that's why I'm saying tonight, I'm asking the question, does it matter? Does sin matter?

Well, here is where Paul is going to give the answer first of all, and then the explanation to the answer following on. Because he doesn't want to confuse anyone immediately.

He wants to go straight to the answer. As soon as he asks this question, does sin matter? Or the way he asks it is, are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

And his answer is absolutely clear. By no means. So he leaves us in no doubt whatsoever.

Now, that's a very strong Greek phrase. It's one that is one of the easier phrases that students at our college have to learn. It's one of the ones that we learn very readily.

[7 : 18] It's meganoito. It's translated in the authorized version, by the way, as God forbid. It's actually not God forbid. That's one of the wrong translations in the authorized version.

It is what we would say, no way. By no means. He's not leaving anyone in any doubt whatsoever.

He then comes on to explain his answer to the question. Now, this is massively important. You know what?

I believe this question is the single most important question a Christian can ask on a daily basis. Let me say that again. This is not just a passing thought here.

This question is the single most important question that you can ask as a Christian on a daily basis. And put it to yourself. Am I to continue in sin so that grace may abound?

[8 : 21] It's a kind of rhetorical question in a way. It's the kind of question where the answer is obvious. By no means. But it's the kind of question that's not a philosophical question.

Neither is it a theological question. It is a practical question. And it's furthermore, it's a helpful question. Because it gives us the kind of guidance that we need in order to know how to live the Christian life in practice.

And how to deal with temptation when it arises. Now, let me stop at that point. And make absolutely clear that there is no such person as a perfect Christian.

Every one of us falls and fails and trips from time to time. And what Paul is not saying here is that there is a way to live the Christian life perfectly.

We can't. There is no way. There's no such person as the perfect Christian. It's very important to make this clear. Because time and again we become discouraged at our own weakness, don't we?

[9 : 38] At least I do and I'm sure you do as well. And at those times of discouragement. When we're made aware of our own sinfulness and how vulnerable we are and how stupid we are.

And that's the problem, isn't it? It's not just a matter of weakness. It's a matter of sheer stupidity. In knowing what's right on the one hand and yet choosing to do what's wrong on the other hand.

I'm speaking from my own experience as a Christian. And you feel, how can I be so stupid as to listen to the wrong voice?

And it's at times like this that you're tempted to become despondent as a Christian and to give up hope for yourself. And to conclude and to listen to another voice that tells you you're not really a Christian after all.

Because you chose the wrong course of action. And that's why the Apostle John says, When we sin we have an advocate with the Father.

[10 : 49] Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sin. So that when we sin, His blood and as we confess our sin to God, He cleanses us from all sin.

So let's make no mistake. I am not, In reading and speaking about this chapter, I am not suggesting that this is a blueprint for the perfect Christian life.

I'm not suggesting that it's possible to live a perfect Christian life. We are not suggesting. But that doesn't mean we don't try. That doesn't mean we don't lay hold of what Paul is saying here and put it into practice.

So that we will, So that our objective, Our aim, Our goal, And the aim and the goal and the objective of every follower of Jesus must be to live like Him.

Remember that's the objective that God has for every one of us. Remember Romans chapter 8? That we are being conformed. That's God's will for you and I as God's people is this, That we be conformed, That we be fashioned and shaped, And that we become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

[12 : 07] And that needs to be our objective as well. That's why Paul said, Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. That's why he said, Put on the whole armor of God.

To be on your guard against the deceitfulness of the evil one. And that's why he's writing this passage. Just as an answer for that, These moments, When we entertain that question, Does sin matter?

Yes, It does. So what then is his explanation then? Let's follow his logic. Let's try to follow his logic as carefully and as clearly as we can.

How can we, he says, How can we, Here's an explanation. How can we who died to sin, Still live in it?

How can we, How can we, Who died to sin, Still live in it? Now that's the question of all importance.

[13:20] How can we, Who died to sin, Still live in it? Then he goes on to give further explanation in verse 3, Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into his death, In order that just as Christ was raised from dead, The dead by the glory of the Father, We too might walk in newness of life.

Verse 5, For if we have been united with him in his death, In a death like his, We shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Now what is Paul saying there? He is saying that Christian baptism is baptism into Christ. We did it this morning. We saw children of believers being baptized.

In so doing, We were placing upon them as a church, The sign of God's covenant with his people. And it's all about Christ. It's all about Jesus.

[14:25] Everything we do in church is about Jesus. The Lord's Supper is about Jesus. Baptism is about Jesus. And it signifies the relationship that there is between Jesus and his people.

The faith relationship. Now, what is that relationship? You're a Christian tonight. You ever sat down and thought, What is my relationship with Jesus Christ?

It's actually fascinating. It's thrilling. It's mind-blowing. Because what the Bible tells us is this.

And if you don't remember anything else about what we said tonight, Remember this. That if you are a follower of Jesus, The New Testament tells you that you have been joined to Jesus.

You have been united to Jesus. You have been brought into a union that will never be broken.

[15:43] And that no one will ever, ever separate you from. It is a union that takes place the moment you come to faith in Jesus. In fact, some would say that it's a union that takes place before you come to faith in Jesus.

I'll leave you to work that one out and to ask that question. Nevertheless, it is a union that takes place in the life of every person who follows Jesus. That means tonight, if you're a follower of Jesus, you have been united with him.

Paul goes further and says we have been united in him. But let's just keep it simple. Let's just think about what it means to be united with Jesus.

It means, for one thing, on a purely practical level, That where I go, he goes. I don't do anything without him.

I'm sure we all have read in various books and magazines and papers and the news about Siamese twins. It's fascinating, isn't it?

[16:55] It's really quite astonishing how it's possible to live your whole life joined to someone else.

And I'm sure we've all read about twins who have been like that. I mean, they tell me that sometimes these twins even marry.

And they try to live as normal a life as it's possible to live. I can't imagine how that is possible. But nevertheless, we have to accept that that's the way a very small number of people live in the world.

Of course, surgeons have developed ways in which some of them can be separated. But nevertheless, the idea of a Siamese twin. Imagine you're spending your whole life never being by yourself.

Where I go, my brother goes. Where he goes, I go. No space, no privacy. Just everything is done with the other person. Well, on a very basic level, that's what it means to be united with Christ.

[18 : 04] Christ has joined himself to us. And we are united to Jesus. Now, I said at the very beginning that I hoped that this passage would help us when we are tempted.

And I believe that right at the very beginning, even the very truth of our being united to Jesus is probably the most helpful reality that there is in combating temptation.

I'll tell you why. Because whenever you're tempted, just stop. And you think, Jesus is right here. He's not up there.

He's right here. Of course, we know that, I'm not going to go into the complexity of this. We know that he has risen and he has ascended to there. But in the person of the Holy Spirit, we are united to God.

And God is present. When I was a wee boy, my mother used to say to me, remember the Lord's watching you. It always used to say when we went out the door, remember the Lord's watching you.

[19 : 15] That was a great piece of advice. Sure that we've all had, if you've had a Christian mother or a Christian father, that, you know, you go out the door and they say that to you.

And it's very solemn, isn't it, to remember the Lord's watching you. But this is more than that. If you're a follower of Jesus, not just that the Lord's watching you, the Lord is right there. Joined to you.

Joined to you. Now, when you think about it, that is such a massive, precious privilege, isn't it? Imagine that. That you are in, the New Testament tells us that if you're a follower of Jesus, you're indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

So that you're never alone. Which also means that if you're in a perplexing and a frustrating and a stressful situation this evening, whatever you're facing this evening, no matter how difficult or how complex it is, God has not left you by yourself.

You are being led and guided by the shepherd who has promised his presence and his help and his guide every step of the way.

[20 : 24] But it also places a huge responsibility on all of us this evening. When you wake up in the morning, you wake up with Jesus. When you have your breakfast, you have your breakfast with Jesus.

You go to work, you take him with you. It also means that he knows everything that you're doing. Every single step of the way. That's what he says.

Verse 5. We have been united with him. Now, he goes on to say, and there's so much that I could say about this. It's such a fascinating subject and such a precious subject. He says in Ephesians chapter 2 that we've been raised together.

And we actually sit in the heavenly places with Jesus. But I'm going to just leave that for the moment. It's just such a glorious thought. And it's one which is so, so comforting.

So what Paul is saying is that we have been united into Jesus. Now, let's stop there. And let's ask the question, what does it mean to die to sin?

[21 : 27] Because remember, verse 2, how can we who died to sin still live in it? The question is, A, what does it mean to die to sin? And when did I die to sin?

What does it mean to die to sin? And when did I die to sin? Well, he goes on to explain in verse 3. Do you not know what? All of us have been baptized into his death.

Now, what that suggests is that when he died, I died. Because that logically follows, doesn't it? I've just said that we've been united to Jesus.

But that's not just for the moment. What that means is that when he died, I died. It means also that when he was buried, I was buried.

It means also that when he was raised to life once again, I was raised to life once again. It means also that when he was taken up to heaven, that I was taken up to heaven once again.

[22:32] Now, I'm not asking us to understand that. I'm asking us to live the reality of it. To live the truth of it in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, why is that important?

It's important because of the nature of his death. Why did Jesus die? Jesus died to sin.

What do I mean by that? He died because the wages of sin is death. He died as the penalty for sin.

Remember how last time we saw that he was the only person in all the world that consistently, his whole life, kept God's law. So why then did he have to die? How come he's suffering death?

He's the one who's perfectly kept God's law. Because he took our guilt upon himself. He became guilty for our sin. And he paid the penalty on our behalf.

[23:39] He went as our substitute to the cross. And went all the way to death. He died to sin. And that is when we died to sin.

We died in him. And what does that mean? For my life. It means, first of all, that all my sins are paid for.

It means that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because tonight, I can look back at Calvary.

And I can know for sure that every awful deed and thought and word that has ever been uttered and committed by me, it's all paid for.

It's gone. It's disappeared. You read this week in the paper that there's this new ruling in Europe where you have the right to be forgotten.

[24:45] Where they're going to force the search engines, Google and so on, to obliterate your past. Because, of course, you want to find out about someone.

If they've got a past, if they've got a record, if they've got skeletons in the cupboard, then all you have to do is you type their name into Google and it'll come up. And your name is all over the place.

For anybody to find out what you've done in the past. Now, there's this ruling that is going to force Google into obliterate, erasing.

I heard a discussion about that recently and people who were talking about it were saying, they were saying, yeah, but you can't actually do that. Because someone somewhere will remember.

And that's true. You know what? When you come to Jesus, when you come to faith in Jesus, God erases everything.

[25:56] And he will choose not to remember it. There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

That's what it means to have died to sin. All my past ugliness and filthiness. But it also means, secondly, that the person I once was has been crucified with Jesus.

The person I once was, what the authorized version calls the old man. The Ivor Martin that once was before I came to faith in Jesus.

He's gone. He's dead. He's a thing of the past. And the person that now is, has been joined to Christ.

And has been raised with Christ. And is in Christ. And lives for Jesus. Not perfectly. There are so many areas that I would love to see improved and changed in my life.

[27:06] And yet I know at the same time. That the Lord is my Savior. And he is my Lord. But it means a third thing as well.

It means that sin no longer has the authority over me. And that's what Paul says. Look in verse 7.

For one who has died has been set free from sin. Let's read this again. Verse 7. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Now, you've probably read that often. And you've probably been troubled by it. You say, because the logical conclusion for that verse is, Well, I can't be a Christian. Because I don't feel I've been set free from sin.

Because I sin every day. What does this mean? Does this mean that I can't be a Christian? No, it doesn't. It means that you're not understanding the verse properly. Let's read it again.

[28:03] The one who has died has been set free from sin. What does that mean? It means this. That you have been set free from the authority of sin.

From the enslavement of sin. That sin is no longer your master. And you are no longer its slave.

That's what it means. So our sin has been erased. The old person that I once was is gone.

Finished. In the past. He's no longer alive. He's dead. And it means thirdly that I am no longer under the authority of sin.

It's no longer my master. Which means, of course, that if you haven't come to Jesus Christ, like it or not, and I know you're not going to like me for saying this, but I'm only saying what's in the Bible, that sin is your master.

[29:11] Jesus himself said, whoever sins is a slave to sin. That's why you need to come to Jesus. To be set free from its authority.

The Bible goes on to say that you are dead in trespasses and sins. That's not my words. These are God's words. And if they trouble you, then come to the Lord. And discover the liberty and the salvation that he gives you in Jesus Christ.

So if that's the case, why then do I still sin? Why is sin still a problem with me?

And I guess I speak for every one of you who follows Jesus this evening. When we lament it, it bothers us so much, doesn't it? It gets under our skin.

Because there's that awful conflict within us, isn't there? On the one hand, we love the Lord Jesus. And on the other hand, we find ourselves doing stuff that we can't make sense of.

[30:19] And there is no explanation to it. It's illogical. That's why Paul says, are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

By no means. How can we, who died to sin, still live in it? There's your single most important question that you can ask every day.

How can I, who died to sin, still live in it? Next time you're confronted by something you're tempted to do, ask this question.

Keep it in front of you. Keep it on your wall. Keep it on your iPhone. Keep it above your mirror in the bathroom. How can I, who died to sin, still live in it?

We are no longer under the authority. And we are no longer enslaved to sin.

[31:28] So then, is there any explanation for why, why we do sin? Well, I want to give you this example. I'm sure I've given this example before. You'll forgive me if you remember it. But, but, but, I think I give it a player meeting once.

I could have given it here once. It doesn't matter. But I'll give it again. We've all read about the slave trade, the awful slave trade that there was in the plantations of America in the 19th century.

In fact, many of you have seen the movie, 12 Years a Slave, which is just a powerful, powerful and awful portrayal of the slave trade. I want you to imagine then that you were a slave.

For years and years and years, you were born a slave. You belonged to the one master. You were born a slave.

You were born a slave. You were born a slave. You were born a slave. You were born a slave. And there was only darkness. And despair. And then one day, a man comes and he says to you, you are now mine.

[33 : 16] I have purchased you. You don't belong to the old master anymore. You're now belong to me. Here's your horse.

Get on your horse and come and follow me. Or you get on the horse and you follow him to his plantation. But this time, it is totally different.

This master is kind and loving and generous. He cares for you. He wants you to have a life.

He's not just interested in himself. He wants to put you first. He's provided for you. He's provided for you. He's provided a home. He's provided a bed. He's provided food and clothing and all the comforts of a man who deeply, deeply cares for you.

Your whole life has become just absolutely wonderful from that moment onwards. You can't believe that your life has changed so much.

[34 : 22] And it's a joy to get up in the morning and to go out and work for him. You go into his field and you're just thinking about the life that you have and how different it is now.

And it's a different atmosphere. There's a liberty and a freedom and there's a purpose. But then one day as you're working for your new master, you're there busy and you hear the sound of a horse coming.

And you look up and to your utter horror, it's the old master. And he stops his horse.

He snaps his finger. And he says to you, go and get me some water. Do you know what you do? You do it.

Without thinking. Instinctively. You get up. You start running to the well. And on the way to the well, you meet the new master.

[35 : 36] The one who loves you. And he says, where are you going? He says, I'm going to the well. What are you going to the well for? He says, because my old boss told me to.

And he says to you, you don't need to obey your old boss anymore. And that's what the Lord says to us tonight.

You don't need to obey your old boss anymore. So you tell him that. You tell him, how can I, who has died to sin, still live in it?

Makes no sense whatsoever. So the next time you're confronted with temptation. Listen. We're all in this together.

You're not alone. Next time you're confronted with temptation, you ask this question. How can I, who died to sin, still live in it?

[36 : 41] Because if you don't ask that question, and if you obey the sinful temptation, the next question that comes to you will be the devil's voice.

And he'll be saying to you, how could you? See, God says, how can you? The devil says, how could you?

Let's put the Lord first. Let's live for him. Let's put his word into practice. We are going to fail. But that doesn't mean that we don't live for him and put him first in every possible respect.

And to seek first the kingdom of Jesus and his righteousness. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Our Father in heaven, we give thanks once again for your word and for how helpful your word is.

We pray that you will keep us, when we are tempted, keep us from falling and from stupidly and foolishly obeying the wrong voices. We ask, Lord, you will give us strength and give us strength in your word and give us to come back to your word time and again to remember who we are in Jesus Christ.

[37 : 55] That we are a new creation in him. We ask, Lord, that you will show us how to live that new creation in his name. Amen. We're going to sing together in Psalm 119, which is on page 402.

Psalm 119, it's verse 33. Sing four stanzas down to 37.

Psalm 119 is the traditional version. The tune is Belmont. Teach me, O Lord, the perfect way of thy precepts divine. Then, why should we not just carry on sinning?

Because the more we carry on sinning, even as Christians, then the more God is going to carry on saving and forgiving and cleansing. Isn't that the case? And the whole thing doesn't make sense.

I mean, what you're saying then is that you're actually giving people a green light to carry on sinning. What they were saying is, what our message is, you have to keep God's law.

[39 : 02] You have to try your best to observe the Ten Commandments. That way, although we do fail from time to time, that way, at least we're trying to keep God's law.

But your way they were saying, your way of calling is to say, well, it doesn't really matter if you think because... Why would you say, when shouldn't they have to have to take their life?

When they would have to talk to you?

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.