

## "How Sinful is Man?" Romans 9

### Introduction

In our preaching this fall we are looking at various doctrines from their practical side. *Doctrines that Will change Your Life* is a series where we are asking what difference it makes if we believe certain truths of the Bible. Last week we asked the question, *How Sovereign is God?* In that study we discovered that we often fall short of understanding that for God to be God He must control all things, even the details of life, or He becomes subject to the whims and decisions of men. One of the hindrances in knowing God the way we should is an improper view of Him.

But that is not the only problem. We are also often hindered by a wrong understanding of ourselves. Who are you really? And what are you like? That's why we are asking the question today, *How Sinful is Man?* Some would argue that man is:

- Good – They would argue that while man is capable of doing bad things, he is not morally corrupt, but fundamentally inclined toward positive actions. This is humanism. When he does evil there is a cause outside of himself – pressures, difficult circumstances, abuse at the hands of others. Man is innocent.
- Neutral – You hear of this as the *blank slate theory*. Man comes into the world

neither inclined toward evil or good – he is shaped wholly by his environment and will turn one way or the other. So, some end up good and some end up bad.

- Bad – But able to overcome. This theory says that man is inclined toward evil, but has the power and ability within himself to turn away from evil toward God. There are actually many Christians today who would hold to some form of this teaching.

As we will see this morning, none of these capture the essence of biblical truth. The Bible teaches that our problem with sin is so deep and widespread that it affects every single area of our life and renders us incapable and powerless to overcome our troubles on our own. What I hope we will see this morning is that understanding the truth about our sin will lead to a greater understanding of grace and deeper love for God.

## [Romans 9]

I've promised you that in this series we will focus on the *so what* of our theology. When it comes to the subject of sin, the practical implications are a little easier to see. If we don't think we have sin, we won't think we need a Savior. If we know we have sinned against a holy God, but we don't know forgiveness and mercy, we will despair of life.

So let's lay a quick biblical foundation for your sinfulness. You likely know many of these verses.

Romans 3:23 – *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* This doesn't describe sin, it simply establishes the fact that we all fit into the category of sinner.

Isaiah 53:6 – *All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.* Here

sin is described as straying from God and doing whatever we want.

Isaiah 64:6&7 - *For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You.* Here we learn that even things that to us appear to be righteous and good are not so in God's eyes because we do them *without arousing ourselves to take hold of God.* In other words, we do them for selfish reasons, not the glory of God.

Ephesians 2:1 – *You were dead in your trespasses and sins.* We have no ability or power to do good. We are dead because of our sin.

Let me ask you a question. What would you say about someone who understood what it meant to be adopted into God's family? Someone who had seen God perform amazing things – parting of the sea, altering natural acts of creation (stopping a storm or hurricane), heal sick people . . . What would you say about someone who knew the Bible inside out and understood the promises of God and the promises of heaven? How would you describe someone who had tasted the blessings of heaven and even seen Jesus?

What Paul said about such people is that the depth of their sins runs so deep within them, that all of those things are not enough to consider them good. All those things can be true about you and you can still be accursed. (Read Romans 9:3-5)

Our sin runs so deep and is so comprehensive that it has killed us. We are not capable of doing anything that is not ultimately selfish and self serving. Paul is so emphatic about this that he wept over his fellow Jews. Verse 1 he

repeats this with dramatic emphasis. *I'm telling the truth. I'm not lying. My conscience preaches this to me. The Holy Spirit preaches this to me.*

Sin is our biggest problem in life.

- It is not superficial. It attacks our minds, our bodies, our spirits, our judgments and our abilities.
- It is not something we can overcome because it has rendered us powerless.
- It is not a temporary annoyance.
- It results in separating us from God, now and forever unless something dramatic happens.

So what needs to happen? Obviously we need help. We need to be rescued or saved.

And so it is that when we understand the depth of our problem, we have the necessary foundation to understand certain teachings of the Bible that some folks find difficult to swallow.

1. Atonement – What happened at the cross? When Jesus died on the cross He was dying for the specific sins of specific people. He didn't die for the possibility of saving people. He was paying the price for particular sins of particular people. Understanding the nature of our sin helps us see the necessity of the crucifixion of Jesus.
2. Grace – This is what Paul is talking about in verses 15-16 (read). Since we don't have any ability or power to save ourselves, we are utterly dependent on the grace and mercy and compassion of God. The determining factor in salvation is not our will, but His. He has to take action toward us, since we will never on our own take a step toward Him.

3. Election or Predestination – When we understand how sinful we really are and how dead that sin has made us, and when realize that at the cross, Jesus was dying for the particular sins of particular people, it's not so hard to realize that God had to decide who Jesus would die for. That's what election teaches. It's a natural outworking of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God which we looked at last week. Paul illustrates this truth historically by recounting the story of the birth of Jacob and Esau. Look at verse 11-13 (read).

None of these truths deny the necessity of faith. Verse 32 explains that the problem with the Jews was that they wouldn't believe in Jesus Christ. It is through faith that the work of Christ is applied to our lives. But we are so entwined in our sin that even faith can only penetrate through it if God powerfully intervenes and makes it happen.

So does the doctrine of the nature of man make a difference? Obviously it makes a huge difference when it comes to bringing us to faith in Christ.

If you are not a Christian

- Consider your sin
- Turn to Jesus in faith

But before we quit this morning, I want to take this doctrine of man and sin and think about it from the perspective of the Christian. It's one thing to consider it in light of the truths of conversion, but what about now? What are you to think about yourself now? How sinful are you? Now that you are a believer in Jesus Christ, what difference does this doctrine make? So here are three more truths

that flow out of what we've seen – along with the so *what?*

1. In Christ you are completely forgiven.

The more you understand the depth of your sin, the more you will understand the greatness of God's mercy and grace to you. Jesus said that he who has been forgiven much loves much.

There is a brand of Christianity that exists today that is so focused on our sinfulness and fallenness, that it robs the believer of any true joy. When I first began my pastoral ministry, I met with a man for a while who professed faith in Christ and was seeking to walk with God. He was a nice guy and eager to learn but he always was sober and serious and often discouraged – in spite of a pretty good set of circumstances in his life. Finally one day, I asked him why he was always so down and serious. And his answer surprised me a little. He said, *I just can't quit thinking about my sin.* At first I thought maybe he was hiding some secret sin, but he assured me it was just the weight and burden of knowing that he fell short of the glory of God. He was so focused on the depravity of man that something was missing.

Listen; when we rightly understand our sin and when sin has been defeated and paid for by Christ, the outcome is complete cleansing and a freedom from its power. You tell me – what better news is there in the world than that? Paul spent most of this letter (1-11) talking about the implications of salvation and if you want to see the outcome of his mediation, look at 11:33-36 (read). Knowing your sin, but knowing God's mercy should lead you to a life of joy and gladness and peace and worship.

2. You are not yet perfected.

No great revelation there – but so what? A right understanding of the nature of man and the nature of the Christian leads us to see that while forgiven much, there is much to yet accomplish. So therefore

- a. Humble yourself under that hand of God.
- b. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

If you are not yet perfected, then you have no reason to boast and you have every reason to press on with all your energy to become like Jesus. And to you who are struggling, I say, fight the good fight. One of the presidential candidates ended his acceptance speech the other night with rallying cry *stand up and fight with me*. Here is the rallying cry for a Christian. Stand up and fight against your sin. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your fight against sin.

3. Your brother in Christ is not yet perfect either. The doctrine of sin affects not only you but everyone else in this church. And that truth needs to fill us with grace. I want to end by looking together at I Corinthians 4:3-5. *But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.*

Paul lays out a couple of really important applications for your life.

- You are responsible for your spiritual condition and will answer to God for it.

- Your brother in Christ is also going to answer to God and not to you.
- Only God can justly judge a man's heart, his motives, and his life.

If we don't get this right, we will be filled with a judgmental, critical, spirit toward one another. But if we understand it rightly, we will learn to bear with one another, forgive one another and love one another – as we together carry on our battle against sin.

Jesus Christ died for one reason alone – to defeat sin and its affects. Knowing how sinful we are should take us back to the foot of the cross. Let's humble ourselves before God, confess our sins to Him and trust Him to cleanse us.