

5. We believe in the natural depravity of the human race.

(Transcript of message preached by Pastor Rick Minett on April 10, 2005 at Grace Community Church)

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:21-23).

Sin means “to miss the mark.” It paints the picture of someone shooting an arrow at a target and the arrow hits the ground before it reaches its target. In today’s vernacular, we might call it “coming up short.” I was at a restaurant recently and when I went to pay my bill of \$10.09, I only had \$10.06 in cash. Surely the cashier would show me pity and forget about the 3 cents, but she didn’t. I ended up having to use a credit card! I came up short.

Not long ago AT&T fired their company president after only nine months. The board of directors said he lacked “intellectual leadership.” However, he received a \$26 million severance package when he was fired. If I were an AT&T stockholder, I’d say somebody on the board of directors came up short on that one.

A man in Orange County, California, was ticketed for driving alone in the HOV lane—which required at least three passengers in the car. When he went to court, he claimed that the four frozen cadavers that he had in the mortuary van he was driving were all passengers and therefore he was qualified to be in the HOV lane. The judge looked at it differently and made him pay the ticket, saying the passengers must be alive. He came up short. Coming up short...the examples are endless. All of us fall into that category and the reason we do is because of “original sin.” It’s because of the natural depravity of the human race.

In the beginning, God had created a perfect world and in this perfect world he placed the pinnacle of His creation, a man named Adam and his wife, Eve. They would serve as the representative heads of the entire human race that would follow them. He gave them absolute freedom of will and only gave them a single restriction—they were forbidden to eat of a single tree in the midst of the garden. Of the other trees, possibly thousands of them, they could eat; but not this one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Lucifer, the anointed cherub who fell from heaven like lightning because of his pride and because he sought to usurp God’s authority in heaven, came to Eve to tempt her, and we all know what happened. Eve buys into the adversary’s lie and takes a bite of the forbidden fruit. Adam, knowing better, stood by silently and then he, too, eats. It was Adam’s sin that caused the fall. Eve was beguiled, but Adam went into this thing with his eyes wide open. Is that important? You better believe it. Because of Adam’s failure, there is a host of ramifications.

A Universal Problem

We have a washing machine at home that is driving us crazy. It keeps breaking down. The control knob that runs the machine has gone bad five times in the past three years. At \$200 a pop, that can drive you crazy! Frigidaire has tried to give us all kinds of reasons why this has happened, but I’ve maintained that this is a “factory defect.” In other words, we got a “lemon” and they need to replace the entire machine. Man also has a defect, but it’s not a “factory defect.” We were created absolutely perfect from the factory, if you please, in the beginning. Our defect is the result of a “choice.” Man chose to sin in the garden and that sin nature has been passed on to each generation that would follow.

I’ve got a “substantial” nose. It’s not one of those little “perky” noses you see on television. That used to bother me, but I’ve grown to accept it because frankly there’s nothing I can do about. My grandfather had a “substantial” nose, his grandfather had one, and on and on the list goes. Somewhere back in time, one of my ancestors started this entire process without ever giving me a choice in the matter. The same is true with our sin nature. Adam was created as the “federal head of the human race.” What he did would implicate all to follow. For example, when President Bush declared war on Iraq, we were at war. It didn’t matter if you agreed with the war or not, if you were a Republican or Democrat, if you were conservative or liberal—you were at war. Why? Because he is our “federal head” what he does implicates the rest of us. Now for those of us that want to get mad at our great...grandfather, Adam, for getting us into this mess, we might need to remember the old legend about a slave name Mose.

Back in the days of slavery, Mose worked in the cotton fields on a southern plantation. One day Mose got to thinking about his plight in life and he finally reached the conclusion that it was Adam’s fault, after all. If Adam would have stayed away from that apple, man would still be in his lush, comfortable garden home instead of out in the fields toiling by the sweat of his brow. The more he thought about it, the madder he got. He began to curse the name of Adam. Just then, the plantation owner came by and asked Mose what he was so upset about and Mose explained how he felt.

“Sir,” he said, “If it hadn’t been for Adam, I wouldn’t be stuck here in this cotton field all day. I’d be in the house resting and sipping lemonade.” The plantation owner said, “Mose, I’ve got good news for you! From now on you don’t have to work in the cotton fields; you can go to the big house and sleep as long as you want and drink all the lemonade you desire. But there’s just one thing, on the kitchen table is a little box and you can’t open it. Okay, go to the house and enjoy yourself.”

Well, over the next few weeks old Mose couldn’t get over his good fortune. He slept as long as he wanted, ate what he wanted, and drank all the lemonade he wanted. But then he noticed the little box the plantation owner spoke about. At first, all Mose did was glance at it, but as the days passed by the temptation to see what was inside grew stronger and stronger. “Why doesn’t he want me to open that box?” Mose thought to himself. “Maybe there is money inside. Maybe it’s the map to some buried treasure on this property.” Finally he couldn’t stand it anymore and he opened the box and saw a single piece of white paper with writing on it.

He held it up and this is what it said, “Mose, you old rascal! Don’t ever blame Adam again! If you had been there in the garden you would have done the very same thing! Now get back to the cotton field and get to work!”

The moral of the story is evident—if we would have been there, the chances are we would have done the very same thing! And we prove it by the way we walk in disobedience even now. No one forces us to sin; it’s a choice and it’s a universal problem. In Romans 3:9, the Apostle Paul says, “*For we all previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.*” In other words, this is a problem that affects both Jew and Gentile. It touches every religion and every class of men. You can find all kinds of men in the world today: white men, black men, red men, yellow men... You can find tall men, short men, thin men, fat men... But there is one man you will never find and that is a man who has never sinned. It’s innate. “*All have sinned...*” All come up short!

An Ugly Problem

In Romans 3, Paul goes on to quote the Psalmist as he talks about the ugliness of sin. In verses 10-18, he says: “*There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.*”

These verses tell us how sin has tarnished our spirit. The spirit in us, created in the image of God, has become blackened by this sin nature. These verses also tell us how sin has tarnished our senses. Verse 11 reminds us that sin has dulled our minds to the truth of God and the things of God; it says if left to himself, no man would seek after God. These verses go on to tell us how sin has tarnished our speech. It’s harsh, but true. “*Tongues that practice deceit...mouths full of cursing and bitterness.*” In Matthew 12:34, Jesus said, “*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*” Sin has infected body, soul, and spirit. And furthermore, please notice that these verses tell us how sin has tarnished our sight. Verse 18 says, “*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*” Paul’s last charge here is that man has reached the place that he no longer fears God. That’s the reason why man is able to do the horrible things that he so often does—man simply doesn’t fear God! Deep in his heart of hearts he may know that there is a God, but he chooses to live his life as if there were no God. He thinks this frees him from restriction, but ironically it only ensnares him more to Satan’s bondage. As I’ve already stated, Satan promises delight, but it only leads to domination. And the Bible has a name for people who live that way; God calls them a “fool.” Psalm 14:1 says, “*The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’*”

Sin is regressive; it’s never stationary; it only gets worst. That’s why people may do things today that they would have never considered doing ten years ago. Oftentimes the pattern is as follows: One puts up with the sin. Then one begins to excuse the sin (“Everyone else is doing it.”). Then one begins to entertain it in his mind. And then one does it! But sin will always take a person further than he wants to go and cost him more than he wants to pay. That is why all of us have to be so watchful, so attentive, and so alert about the way we live. Throughout the Word of God the word “watch” is used time and time again. 2 Timothy 4:5 tells us to “*be watchful in all things.*” It’s why Jesus told His disciples in the garden to “*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation...for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” And if we don’t guard against sin; three things are bound to happen:

First of all, sin will cause us to lose our confidence in the presence of God. When the Bible says that sin will separate us from God, it’s not referring to our salvation as believers, but to our state of being. We feel unworthy and our feelings of unworthiness drive us farther and farther away from Him.

Secondly, sin will cause us to lose our courage in the face of the enemy. Unresolved sin in our lives will turn crusaders into cowards. I’ve had the privilege of walking through the great ancient Coliseum of Rome. It’s one of the most fascinating places I’ve ever been. It’s been the sight of great triumphs and some of the most horrendous tragedies ever known to man. As you know, gladiators would battle to the death purely for the entertainment of the masses. But all of that changed one day in the Fourth Century when a frail, little Christian named Telemachus entered the Coliseum floor.

History tells us that this man lived in a remote little village and one day as he was on his knees in prayer, he heard the Lord tell him to go to Rome and he did. After walking several weeks to get there, he entered the city and saw what appeared to be a great festival. He had never seen anything like this before in all his life. He followed the crowds to the Coliseum. He watched as gladiators came out and stood before the emperor and said, “We who are about to die, salute you.” It was then he realized these men were going to fight to death simply to entertain the masses. He cried out, “In the name of Christ, stop!” As the games began, he pushed his way through the crowd, climbed over the wall, and dropped to the floor of the arena. When the crowd saw this tiny figure of a man rushing toward the gladiators they thought it was all a part of the show and started to laugh. But when they saw him pleading with the gladiators to stop, laughter turned to anger. And then...as he was begging them to stop in the name of Christ, a sword was plunged into his body. He fell to the ground and just before he took his last breath, he said, “In the name of Christ, stop!” Then a strange thing happened. As the gladiators stood over the little man expecting the crowd to cheer, a hush fell over the Coliseum. A man stood up and walked out, then another, and another... In dead silence, everyone left. The year was 391 and from what we know, that was the last battle to the death between gladiators in the Roman Coliseum. Never again, at least in this place, did men kill each other for the entertainment of the crowd; all because of one little voice that was courageous enough to speak God’s truth in love.

We may not have a Roman coliseum today, but let me assure you that the masses are still killing people today. Peer pressure is still destroying lives—look what it does to our young people. People all around us are dying; dying as they succumb to the wishes and pressures of the crowd. And what the world so desperately needs is people of courage; people who speak the truth in love. But again, sin will keep us from doing that, because unresolved sin will turn crusaders into cowards because it causes us to lose our courage in the face of the enemy. So the Bible tells us over and over again to “watch.” Because if we aren’t watchful, if we don’t guard against sin, sin will cause us to lose confidence in the presence of God, sin will cause us to lose our courage in the face of the

enemy, and sin will cause us to lose our compassion for others because the root of sin is selfishness. Sin has a way of turning everything in our life inward—drawing our focus to “me, myself, and I.” Sin is ugly for the unbeliever because it leads him to hell, and it’s ugly for the believer who doesn’t guard against it because it causes him to lose his confidence, his courage, and his compassion.

An Undeniable Problem

One of the things that I’ve learned in my 30-plus years of ministry is that it’s very difficult to help people until they are willing to acknowledge that they need help. As long as they deny that they have a drug problem, it’s hard to help them overcome drugs. As long as they deny that they have an alcohol problem, it’s hard to help them overcome alcohol. As long as they think they don’t have an anger problem, it’s hard to help them overcome their anger. And as long as they think they don’t have a sin problem, it’s hard to help them overcome their sin. The world is filled with people who don’t think they have a problem, when they do. They will say, “But I’m a good person. I go to church on occasion and I don’t hurt people.” That’s good, but that doesn’t settle the sin problem that is innate as ancestors of Adam.

One evening, when my son, Alex, was about three years old, we bought a bag of white powdered donuts and told him he would have to wait until breakfast to have one. He really wanted one before he went to bed, but he had to wait. So we put donuts on top of the refrigerator, out of his reach. Everyone went to bed, and then sometime in the middle of the night I heard some noise in the kitchen. First it was the sound of little feet and then I heard the sound of a chair being drug across the floor. I purposely made some noise from our bedroom and then I heard more noise from the kitchen. I heard the sound of a chair being drug back across the floor and then the sound of little feet scampering away. I waited a few minutes and then I went into the kitchen. Sure enough, the bag of donuts had been opened. I went into Alex’s bedroom and he was tucked completely under the covers, appearing to be asleep.

“Alex, are you sleeping?” I asked. He rubbed his little eyes and said, “Daddy, why did you wake me?” I said, “Alex, did you get into those donuts?” He replied, “No, daddy, no.” So I said, “Alex, then explain something to me” and I told him to get out of bed and follow me. Then we walked into the bathroom and I turned on the light. I said, “Alex, then look in the mirror and explain to me what that big white ring of powdered sugar is around your mouth.” And when he looked in the mirror he knew he couldn’t deny it. The mirror gave him away!

The law is like a mirror. We may deny it, but it shows us our sin. Paul says it this way in Romans 3:19, “*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*” Verse 20 says, “*...for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*” J.B. Phillips’ translation says it this way, “*It is the straightedge of the Law that shows us how crooked we are.*” We can deny that it’s a problem, but it’s undeniable! The entire human race has been affected, and until it’s dealt with it is going to affect everything about our lives: The way we feel, the way we think, the way we live...will all be affected by sin. A classic example of this is demonstrated in Psalm 51, David’s prayer of repentance after he had been with Bathsheba. This prayer makes it absolutely clear that regardless of what we say, the ramifications of sin cannot be denied. Everything in one’s life will be affected by sin.

It will affect the way one feels. David had sinned and now he feels miserable, and that is why he says, “*Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin*” (Psalm 51:1-2). As I said earlier, sin will crush your confidence in the presence of God. Unresolved sin will make you doubt your relationship with God.

The way one thinks will be affected by sin. David said, “*For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is always before me*” (Psalm 51:3). You cannot run from it because the Holy Spirit won’t let you, and if you do not deal with it, it’s going to affect the way you think, feel and possibly even your disposition, attitude and health. It carries with it an emotional weight that none of us are capable of dealing with in our own strength.

It will affect the way one lives. In verse 8, David says, “*Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice.*” When one sins and fails, God won’t discard him, but He will crush him. He will start to “squeeze” that person until he has to deal with the sin because God loves us too much to leave it unresolved.

And without a doubt, sin will affect one’s joy. In verse 12, David said, “*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation...*” He didn’t lose his salvation, but he sure lost the joy of his salvation. There’s an old saying that goes: “Don’t let anyone steal your joy.” That’s not speaking about the temporary happiness that things bring, but rather the joy that’s based on a relationship. And the truth of the matter is this—no one can steal your joy unless you let them. Bankruptcy can’t steal your joy, calamity can’t steal your joy, and even the death of loved ones can’t steal your joy. The only thing that can steal your joy is sin! And it will!

Man can deny that sin is a problem, but the Bible clearly speaks about the natural depravity of the human race. The Bible tells us that Adam fell and when he fell, sin infected a perfect planet. And it didn’t take long for sin to corrupt the world, did it? In Genesis 1, there is a perfect world without sin and only five chapters later, Genesis 6, we read these words in verse 5: “*Then the Lord saw that wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*”

How does a worm get inside an apple? An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom and then sometime later the worm hatches in the heart of the apple—eating its way out, not in. Sin is like a worm. It begins in the heart because it’s innate, it’s a seed planted by Adam; and then it works its way out through our thoughts, our words and our actions.

There’s another old saying that goes: “What you can’t see, won’t hurt you.” But when it comes to the sin issue, just the opposite is true. And that is why the adversary wants you to concentrate on the exterior, what others see; while God wants you to concentrate on the interior, what He sees. So what does God see in your heart? Are you hitting the target or are you missing the mark?