

What Ever Happened to Sin?

It was about 1980. I was the Pastor of First Presbyterian Foley, MN—my first pastorate. Some tension had developed in the church because I introduced them to the theology of the charismatic renewal. This was new information to most of them. It shocked some people. Some people were upset. Some of our elders felt I needed to be evaluated psychologically.

Most of the people really seemed to love us but some were not too sure about us. **Beth and I were sent to spend a week at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas.** I'm sure they had good intentions. It was very humbling to be sent there, but we went.

It was actually a good week. Beth and I got to play tennis every day and somebody was back home taking care of the kids. But after a week of psych testings, and even the electrodes-on-your-head test, their psychologist concluded that my elevator really didn't go to the top floor because **I claimed to hear from God And I spoke in a language I did not understand.** That's what happens sometimes when you send a charismatic pastor to a non-charismatic church!

The irony of that is that **just across town** was the spot where another guy with Fox in his name made history: Charles Fox Parham had a Bible School where on Jan 1, 1900, **Agnes Ozman** was the first person in America to speak in tongues. She spoke and wrote Chinese as her heavenly language, although she has never studied it.

The founder of the Medicare Clips Kent clinic with Dr. Carl Menninger. In 1973 he wrote a book called **Whatever Happened to Sin.** As a devout Christian, he was alarmed that even in 1973 **preachers had to going to avoid talking about sin** in their sermons. As a clinical psychologist, he saw the **devastation that sin can cause** in a person. He was alarmed that churches seemed to avoid warning people about the biblical commandments against sin.

Well, today I'm going to talk about sin. And it is a serious warning from the Bible. You might be tempted to not listen, be frightened or even be upset when I talk about this subject but remember this:

**This is a warning from a Father who loves you and me more than we love ourselves:
Our Heavenly Father.**

Sin kills. Sin robs. Sin poisons.

Sin is the greatest source of mass destruction in the universe. Sin alone sends people to hell. Sin forced Jesus to die on the cross. Jesus paid the eternal penalties for all our sins but sin can still steal blessings from Christians and damage Christians on earth.

Two Premises for This message:

1. Some sins are **more serious than others** in God's sight. Sins are like crimes. Every human judge knew not all crimes are equal.
2. God will **sometimes discipline us** for serious, persistent sins: Heb 12: 5-6

How Should a Loving Father Respond?

Let's try to understand this side of God's nature by asking ourselves how should a loving father respond in these three situations.

Slide 5: Three temptations: cookies, stove, gun

SO:

To not talk about sin would be like **not telling people to wash their hands during an ebola epidemic.**

To not talk about sin would be like **not telling your kids not to put their hands on a hot stove.**

To not talk about sin would be like **not telling your kids to not play with your loaded gun.**

To not discipline your child for disobeying you in those three examples would be **to endanger your child's safety.**

No loving Father would do that.

A good Father would **discipline his child if they did not obey his rules** to protect them from injury or death.

Remember this as we talk about sin today.

I would like to speak to you today about one of the worst sins that a Christian can commit.

In fact I would say that it is the ones in **God shows the least amount of tolerance for in the New Testament.** By that I mean that the New Testament describes the **earthly consequences** of this sin in much more detail and much more dramatically than it does the consequences of most other sins.

I'm going to speak to you frankly and firmly about **a sin that is stealing many blessings from many Christians** and a sin that causes Christians to hurt others.

Can you guess what that sin is?

It is the sin of unforgiveness

As we will see, Christians are commanded by God to forgive others under all circumstances, regardless of the offense and regardless of our feelings.

I hope you will listen carefully to this message on the dangers of unforgiveness. I am not going to water this message down to make sure I do not ruffle any feathers. **Jesus spoke very plainly and forcefully about this sin, so I must also.**

“But Pastor Bob,” you may ask, “We have all just had two tough months enduring the COVID restrictions. Why talk about such an unpleasant topic now?”

This message began to form in my mind as I read from the book of Ezra, chapter 10 where he discovers that the Jews who had just returned from exile in Babylon were now committing one of the very sins that had **forced God to send them into exile 70 years earlier**. He discovered that many of the Jews were marrying foreign wives who worshiped other gods. **This was a sin that could have destroyed the nation of Israel again.**

So, even though it was very difficult, **Ezra forced all of those Jews to give up their foreign wives and the children that had been born of that sinful marriage**. You can only imagine the emotional pain, the trauma of everyone involved. I don't even like to think about it it so painful. And yet they had to in order to obey God and protect their nation from being severely disciplined by God again.

That incident and as made me think of what Jesus says about unforgiveness. It's one of the few places in the Gospels where Jesus warns his followers **very sternly to avoid sin**.

Forgiving Others Can Be Hard

I know this from **much personal experience**.

God has disciplined me to be very good at forgiveness. I had to learn **the hard way**. Almost every day of my life growing up, I had plenty of things to forgive. **I was raised by good grandparents but they didn't know how to love well and their own hurts caused them to be angry most of the time.**

My brother and I grew up with **no physical affection, no verbal affection plenty of work, and plenty of angry words and angry, harsh discipline**. By high school, **I hated my grandfather**. It was like **cancer** inside of me. I could not be happy. It was constant darkness in my soul **for years. It twisted my personality**. After I left home the Lord convicted me of my sin and I forgave my grandfather completely and trying to love him as well as like for the rest of his life.

That's why God has commandments to avoid certain behaviors He calls sin: **to protect people He loves from being hurt by the consequences of sin.**

My job today is to remind us all, including myself, that **holding onto unforgiveness is a very very foolish, and self-destructive decision.**

In the paraphrased words of Sir Winston Churchill, ***unforgiveness is a sin up with which God will not put!*** God has little patience with this sin. We know this from several Scriptures.

No less an authority than the words of Jesus in the Lord's Prayer shows us God's powerful warning against unforgiveness:

This is a very strange statement from God who sent Jesus came to die for all our sins so we could be forgiven for all our sins.

I would interpret that to mean that born-again Christians still go to heaven in they refuse to forgive others, but God would allow us to **suffer some temporary earthly penalty** because of their unforgiveness.

This parable by Jesus in Matthew 18 is an example of the earthly penalties we could suffer due to unforgiveness.

Slide 8: Matt 18

Slide 9: Eph. 4:26

Slide 10: Summary

Hate is like poison. Hating or holding unforgiveness against someone is like **drinking poison and hoping the other person will die.** Hate kills. Unforgiveness is a sickness of the soul that can destroy a life. I know. I was there.

A person who chooses to hold deep unforgiveness will never be happy. They will **never be as healthy physically, emotionally, spiritually or relationally as they could be.** Unforgiveness can make us physically ill. I have had relatives who could not forgive and suffered terribly from rashes and stomach problems.

How to Heed the Warnings of Jesus:

1. **Sincerely forgive the same day you are offended.** This satisfies the **legal requirement** of God to forgive others.
2. **Obey the commands of Jesus: return good for evil**
 1. Pray for the offender
 2. Do something nice for them— a card, a gift, a kind word
 3. Do it to obey God, not because you feel like it.
 4. If you can, talk to them and seek reconciliation quickly.

But what if I still have angry feelings towards the offender even after I have done all that?

Give new wounds a few days to heal. If the anger persists, it could be you are **believing a lie about your anger.** It usually is a hidden belief you have to examine your heart about. Somehow you believe there is a hidden benefit to holding onto your anger:

Does it **feel true** to you that you need your anger toward them to:

1. **Protect yourself?**
2. **Empower yourself**
3. **Verify that you were wronged**
4. **Use as revenge against them?**

Your feelings will reveal to you what you really believe about your anger toward the offender.

If you identify one of those four beliefs as possibly being true for your anger toward someone, then ask God what He thinks of that belief.

Just wait and listen for His response. He will communicate His perspective to you on one of those beliefs. When he does, that belief will shatter and you will be freed from the angry feelings you have been stuck in.

There is much more to be said about the power of forgiveness to heal us and others. Forgiveness is like a Swiss Army knife for emotional and spiritual and physical healing. **That's why God is so determined to make sure we forgive!**

I hope this has helped you. God wants you to know how serious this issue is. He loves you too much to not warn you. He loves us too much to not discipline us if we choose not to forgive.

You may not struggle with this much now. But as we get close to the return of Jesus, Jesus warned us that the world will turn against Christians more and more. Be prepared to be offended! Be prepared to forgive and return good for evil. **That is our best and the godliest defense against the poison of hatred, bitterness, and unforgiveness!**

Let's pray.