

SERMON ON SIN

BY

JOHN PAUL

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JOHN PAUL

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INTRODUCTION.

This sermon, as preached in 1898, was published at the request of brethren. It is revised in hope of making it more effective.

My efforts are always practical; it is contrary to my design as well as beyond my ability to make a literary production.

The province of this discourse is to discuss the proposition that Christians sin; and our purpose is, using the word of God as a scale, to weigh this unfortunate doctrine and its supporters; to prove that it is an unscriptural doctrine, and that its supporters either labor as victims of a stupid heart or "perish for lack of knowledge."

We may not recover many of those who have committed themselves to this subtle doctrine, but, while we bear witness to them, we hope to warn those who are in danger of embracing this error, lest they also turn to a pillar of salt.

To the prayers of Christians we recommend
ourselves in pressing this main issue of the holy
war.

JOHN PAUL,

A SERMON ON SIN

Text: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."
—Ezek. 18:4.

The sin question is a prominent one in the Christian world to-day. The weapon of every Christian soldier should glitter against sin; the teaching of every ambassador of the cross should be definite in regard to sin, what it is, and who commits it; because the mystery of antinomianism doth already work, and Satan is trying to make sin appear excusable if not plausible.

Sin is not to be estimated in the light of its immediate effects, or judged lightly because it is simple in form, convenient to transact, and not always disgraceful. There is within every violation of God's law an imperishible germ of death. When once a sin is conceived and brought forth by a moral agent, it goes forth on an immortal career. It can be forgiven, but it cannot be called back. With its influence, and even with its effects, like an excarnate vulture, it flies on forever

As a disease, once let loose in the spiritual system, sin is progressive. It eats out the vitals of its victim. Just as sure as it begins its work, and its beginning may be rather pleasant than painful, it completes the ruin of the soul, and furnishes eternity with a picture so dreadful in its proportions that we cannot provide words to describe it here.

Our purpose in this discourse is to deal not only with a sinning religion, which advocates the *dominion* of sin, but with that milder heresy which insists upon the *being* of sin as a necessity till soul and body separate. We will not do this by the method of popular sermonizing, but by carrying you from text to text in the Book of God.

The idea that Christians must sin has been instilled in the hearts of children in this country until they look upon one who preaches a clean gospel as a modern heretic. They call us scorners forth of extreme and unreasonable doctrine, charging us with teaching that we cannot sin. I have never met a man who taught that it is a physical impossibility for children of God to commit sin. Salvation does not reduce our freedom as moral agents.

Before taking up this subject, we must get rid of confusion in regard to the definition of *sin*. An error is not always a sin; sin is a willful departure from a known law. Before we can be guilty, our wills must be involved.

If you sin, you know when you do the deed, and you are conscious that it is sin. Using the expression of another, "Sin is committed willingly, knowingly, and consciously."

"Oh," says the sinning religionist, "this relieves the confusion; your doctrine is not quite so extreme when you protect it with qualifying definitions." But, I answer, my definition is not peculiar; the simple facts I state are in reach of all honest men.

Church sinners love to confuse error with sin—involuntary transgression with voluntary transgression. This soothes their guilty consciences, so that they can do ungodly deeds and yet cherish a hope for eternal life.

Many people of to-day search their Bibles to see how much they can find in favor of sin. They take such passages as refer to man in his unsaved state, for example, the first and seventh chapters of Romans, 1 John 1:8, Eccl. 7:20, and wresting these from their proper

meaning, they use them to comfort their lost souls. The modern "Christian" is more afraid of perfection than he is of imperfection; more afraid of holiness than he is of sin.

The idea prevails that this doctrine, that Christians do not sin is peculiar to holiness people—those who have had the "second blessing." But righteousness comes before holiness; a man is justified before he is sanctified. Now if justified means to become just, and if just means to be righteous, I submit that a man is no preacher of justification, if he countenances a sinning religion. Nay, he is not a Christian, much less a Christian minister.

SIN IS AN AWFUL THING.

We should be more afraid of it than we are of death or hell.

Charles G. Finney says that sympathy for the human race should not actuate us most to seek for their salvation, but the fact that sin so direfully dishonors God. This is sadder to a holy man than the sad fact that millions are moving down to hell. And a man who converts a sinner from the error of his way is not more rejoiced that he has saved a soul from

death, than he is that he has covered, or prevented, a multitude of sins.

Oh, how sin stirs the heart of God! Nothing else will provoke anger in His great, loving spirit. Nothing else can pave and fire and populate a region like hell. A man may be insignificant, and seem unnoticed under heaven, but when he sins it reaches the skies; it calls the attention of God; and justice and vengeance set out on his trail. Sins are never qualified in the Bible; they are denominated great, and greater (St. John 19:11), but not small and great. Those that are recognized by human courts as little sins were conceived as early as great sins, came from the same father, and are equally contemptible in the sight of God. There is sense in all God's commandments; they duplicate the laws of nature, and are founded in deep philosophy. The violation of any of them is at a disadvantage to spirit, soul and body.

YOU MUST NOT SIN.

God forbids it. If none can live without it, none can be saved. We are not saved by law, but it must be remembered that Christ,

instead of canceling the law, enlarged upon it as grace increased our ability to keep it. If there ever was a time when man could not live without breaking the law God gave him, there was a time when man could not be saved.

In reviewing the Scriptures on this subject, we begin at Ex. 20:20. We are rich in references to divine authority, but will use only a few out of the many. The quotation referred to is, "That his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not." God designed this. Did God design something that was impossible?

We pass on to Psalms 4:4; "Stand in awe and sin not." The Holy Spirit commanded this.

What conception have you of God? Do you think He would tell us to do something we could not do? Never! An earthly father would not do that, unless by mistake, and God never makes mistakes.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

God told Adam that in the day he did eat the forbidden fruit, he should die; and he died that day, spiritually, and became a wretched apostate. One sin did it.

The devil preached his first sermon in the

garden of Eden. His text was, "Ye shall not surely die." He got two converts then, and has been preaching the doctrine effectually ever since. He no longer has to use a snake to administer this poison; many "gospel" ministers, in high standing among men, have tendered him their services.

Some sinning religionists claim to have found a proof of their doctrine in their own experience. Here it is: "I know I sin. I know I have been converted, I know a converted man cannot fall." We are prepared to say that their first proposition is true, the second is doubtful, and the third is untrue. Therefore they have argued in a circle. A man must get above committing sin before he can prove by the Word of God that he is elected. One of two things is always true where a man commits sin: he has never been a Christian, or he is a backslider.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

This truth is of such importance that it is repeated in the same chapter. I would as soon play with dynamite as tamper with the truth it teaches.

To prove that a man has to sin would des-

roy the fact of free moral agency, and, according to the text, make him unavoidably a suicide. Convince a man that he must sin, and of course he will go at it. Convince some church members that they may sin, and they will jump at the "privilege." Convince the church that sin is a necessity, and you have, in a degree, licensed people to sin. I am now ready to say that the doctrine of sinning Christianity is as great an insult to the court of heaven as the indulgences of the Roman Catholic Church. It is absolutely doing more harm to-day.

"The soul that sinneth"—not the body—the soul of man is the only creature in the earth that is capable of sinning. You claim that your flesh sins. This is a doctrine of a heathen philosophy of olden times, called Gnosticism. It is, now, thank God, almost out of date in good society. It is alike contrary to Scripture and common sense to assert that material contains sin. The Scriptures make one allusion to sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3), and in the same breath the apostle expresses the condemnation of heaven against it. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Rom. 8:8.) But

speaking to a people who are mortal, just as we, he says, "But ye are not in the flesh." So you see "flesh" in the Bible sometimes means carnality, or spiritual impurity. If the flesh is capable of sinning, it has the responsibility of a rational creature, and is capable of burning in hell. For no automaton, or common piece of machinery, is capable either to be rewarded with eternal bliss or cursed with everlasting punishment. To say that the body must contain sin until death, would make the grave a savior. The old graveyards would be perfect beds of sin, because of the decomposed flesh therein. Scientists have dissected human bodies, but they have failed to find anything that looked like sin in human flesh. Sin is not physical, but a spiritual disease; therefore, it must be located in the soul, even though it does affect the body.

The sin-in-the-flesh gospel is an unclean gospel. It logically concludes that the more flesh we have, the more sin we have. So the giant who is religious would have reason to wish he were a dwarf;—the Jumbo might well wish he were a Tom Thumb.

"There is one kind of flesh of men, another

flesh of beasts, and another of fishes, and another of birds;" but it is all flesh—mere material. To show the folly of the notion that material contains sin, we will notice a current illustration: The ox or mule may murder his mate, or even kill a man, yet they neither try him before the bar nor put him to death. A man murders his fellow; they try him in the court and hang him. Why is this difference made? Do not say because man is a rational creature, for the man might have been drunk when he committed the crime; and if he was not, where under heaven is rationality seated except in the human soul? The immortal soul in man, with its capacity for holiness and its capacity for sin, explains his peculiar responsibility to the judges of the earth and the Judge of the universe.

Now you cannot commit sin and plead spiritual impotence because of sin in the flesh or spirit. God has removed the necessity. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." 1 John 1:7. This is without modification, whether in the flesh or in the soul. "All sin" means all sin. This covers the whole ground. "Cleanseth" is in the present tense,

and therefore cannot mean on our death-beds or in our graves. "Cleanseth us;" not figuratively, not by imputation, but actually "cleanseth us from all sin." Glory to God!

Both in Jno. 5:14 and 8:11 occur the command, "Sin no more." These words were spoken by the Son of God. He who is able to keep them from sin said, "Sin no more." Who would put crafty constructions on this, destroy its plain meaning, and twist the pure Word of God to fit an impure life? Oh, man, learn wisdom! If thou wilt not submit to an elevation of morals, touch not the standard of the Almighty.

"Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." John 8:34. "Sin" is in the singular number—one sin. Remember, "Ye cannot serve two masters." This text sweeps away the idea that a man can be a sinner and a Christian at the same time.

We are aware that most people, especially mere religious professors, seek a cloak for their sins. They very confidently hide behind the Bible characters; but the fact that some Bible characters committed sin, makes it none the less heinous. An example in weak excuses

is found in that they refer to 1 Tim. 1:15, where Paul humbly confesses that he is the "chief" of sinners. An interpretation of this to suit some people would make the apostle a desperate character; really worse than a hog thief, and at the same time preaching the gospel. The result of a literal interpretation of the text would be absolutely to separate Christianity and righteousness, a thing which many people would gladly do.

I quote a short comment on this verse from Dr. W. B. Godbey: "Many have stumbled over this statement, but I see no good reason. Cognomens and epithets survive changes of character in all human circles. In my travels I preach side by side with saloon keepers, drunkards, infidels, thieves, and gamblers, with a number of whose names I am perfectly familiar. We all know them, and frequently designate them by these dark epithets. * * * Neighbor John is well known as a painter, though he has not painted a house since he got rich, twenty years ago. Neighbor Samuel is a sailor; so born, reared, and educated; but he has not sailed in twelve years. At the time of this writing Paul was the chief of sinners, yet,

as he says, himself, in the same sentence, gloriously saved, and consequently a great encouragement to those who shall believe on Him unto eternal life." Paul had evidently gone out of the sinning business at that time. He refers to himself elsewhere as an example for others to follow as he follows Christ. As the above mentioned preacher says, while in heaven, playing upon his golden harp, he still calls himself the chief of sinners. He who has been the darkest sinner is to-day among the happiest saints. He does not rejoice in the darkness of his past deeds, but praises the long suffering Christ who saved him for them.

Rom. 6:11, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that you should obey it in the lust thereof." The soul is in the body, and he here warns them not to have the members of the body used to do evil at the impulse of the "old man" who occupies the unsanctified heart. Now if you will have it that there is sin in your flesh, according to this scripture it must be subdued; and it stands without proof that he who is able to chain the lion is able to slay him.

Thus the Bible handles the sin subject in more places than we have time to mention, finally coming to a sweeping climax in 1 John 3:8, where it plainly says, "He that committeth sin is of the devil." That is, the devil is his father; and as he belongs to that household he will have to spend eternity in hell, or quit sinning and get saved.

"Awake to righteousness and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame." 1 Cor. 15:34. Here again we have the positive command to "sin not." One might ask why people sin in the face of this command. The answer is, they are asleep. He who teaches a sinning religion may be wise or otherwise in the things of this world, but one thing is certain; he has not an intelligent conception either of God or his law. He is asleep on the main issue—sleeping the sleep of spiritual death; so the apostle's first command is, "Awake to righteousness," and then, "sin not." *Wake up, and get up*; this is the natural succession. All this uproar on the subject of sinning is caused by people getting the "cart before the horse;" unregenerate people trying without success to come up to

the standard of Christian righteousness. Let it be remembered that there must be a Christian before there can be any Christianity.

It is blasphemy to say, by word or action, that God's commandments are hard to keep; nay, to say they cannot be kept, is worse. For it is written, "His commandments are not grievous," 1 John 5:3. Which simply means they are not hard to keep.

I SPEAK THIS TO YOUR SHAME.

It is possible that you are a devil worshipper when under the light of Romans 6:20 you acknowledge that Satan is able to free you from righteousness, but deny the Scriptural and reasonable statement that Jesus is able to free you from sin; for you pay a compliment or make a concession to the prince of darkness, and cast reflection upon our powerful Savior. You admit that Jesus can bless us on earth and catch us as we leap into eternity, but maintain that Diabolus must hand us down as bondmen to our graves!

"Be ye angry and sin not," Eph. 4:26, even under a circumstance of righteous indignation against evil, for we are to have no unholy

tempers, we are not excused for committing sin.

“SIN NOT.”

This is a sweeping command which rings out to every generation of men, which comes down with full force through the pages of Holy Writ.

John Wesley said in substance that he could succeed in conquering the world for Jesus if he had a reasonable number of men who hated nothing but sin and desired nothing but God. Now, instead of many professors of religion being angry with sin, they love it. This is the secret of your clinging to this untenable doctrine;—your love for sin. Ye sin because ye love to sin! You may pretend to hate it, and resort to a misconstruction of such scripture as the seventh chapter of Romans for an apology, but it is evident that such as the fifteenth verse of this chapter would fit you better if it read, “What I could I wouldn’t, and what I should I didn’t.”

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” James 2:10. “Guilty!” How can you

be a guilty man with "no condemnation?" (Romans 8:1.)

Listen to another plain statement in 1 John 2:4: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him." What does it mean to keep the commandments of God? Let each one take time to answer that.

But some one will resort to imputed righteousness, because the apostle says, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth." This truth, as well as the truth that we are justified by faith, is a very wholesome doctrine, but it need not be magnified at the expense of a decent Christian life. Christ is the end of the perfect law for us, and its fulfillment is imputed unto us through faith. But we are required to keep the moral law for his sake. These are his commandments. "He left us an example that we should follow in his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." 1 Peter 2:21-22.

Peter says that some of the Scriptures are wrested by the unlearned and unstable unto their own destruction, (II Pet. 3:16). Doubt-

less by the wrong interpretation of the doctrine of imputation and kindred subjects in the book of ROMANS, thousands of people get too close to sin; and as wrong belief creates wrong practice, they are wending their way to moral ruin.

The phrase, "a liar and the truth is not in him," occurs in another verse. Sin lovers love that verse; it is often on the end of their tongues. They teach it to their children; many of them know it when they do not know the first commandment of God. The verse reads this way: "He that liveth, and saith he sinneth not is a liar, and the truth is not in him." This is from the writings of Beelzebub. This belongs to the class called "home-made" scripture. Were this not untruthful it would be like another "scripture" a man was enquiring about, namely, "He that sitteth down upon a hot stove will rise again." Let men quote whatever they will as Bible, when you search that grand old book you will find no defense for sin.

YOU NEED NOT SIN.

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to

them that believe on his name." John 1:12. If you sin you are a child of the devil (I John 3:8). "Power to become a son of God" is therefore power to keep from sin. You acknowledge that according to this text there is power imparted to the Christian of which the sinner knows nothing. A power to do right—a power to bear the fruits of righteousness (right living) which the unregenerate do not possess. Now, what sins do you have to commit? Book them down and pray over them. Could not any sober, self-possessed person, without the grace of God, travel the path of righteousness about as successfully as you do? And yet the Savior says. "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Righteousness is some of these fruits. Yea, the kingdom itself is "righteousness" as well as "peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Where can the line be drawn between the saved and the lost? It is true, God's eye can distinguish where we see no distinction; but he says to finite men, "Ye shall know them." "Christians commit some sin" it is said. How much can they commit before they cease to be "called the children of God?" It is said they

do, and must, violate at least some of the ten commandments. Then is there any revealed scale of limitation? I have never heard of any; and if there is none, Christianity and righteousness are two different things.

But it is said divine love distinguishes the children of God from the children of the world. I know love is a great mark of discipleship; but those who love God, keep his commandments. (1 John 5:3) The only rule God has given us for distinguishing is by their fruits, and the never failing test that "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil." 1 John 3:7-8.

Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." 1 John 4:4. Satan is "he that is in the world." Satan is the one who tempts the Christian; and Satan is the author of sin. Christ is "he that is in you," if you are a true Christian. Now if you prove that Satan is greater than Christ, you prove that the Christian religion is a sinning religion. But if I prove that Jesus Christ, the Christian's indwelling Savior and Companion, is greater than

Satan, I have proved that Christians need not sin.

I am here called upon to define what we mean by the term, "sinning religion." We mean a religion that, whatever its quality may be, is not sufficient in quantity, depth or strength, to keep its possessor from willingly violating a known law of God. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful (even if temptations do come), who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." I Cor. 10:13. Temptation must come before sin. It is the forerunner of that deadly creature called Sin. I was raised in a land of rattlesnakes, and there is one thing in the make-up of a rattle snake I appreciate: he rattles before he bites. When he begins to rattle, you have no time to lose in making "a way of escape," and even then your escape is uncertain. But in the case of temptation, the promise of deliverance is sure; God has pledged his honor that sin shall not be a necessity.

Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee." Isa. 26:3. Emphasize the statement, "Thou wilt keep him." "The Lord is thy keeper." Psa. 121:4: To say that we have to sin is to charge God with incompetence to keep. It is as easy, and as much to His glory to keep us from sin as it is for Him to save us from it after we have fallen into it. If, after coming to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), He is unable to keep them from their sins, God cannot finish what He has begun. But our consolation is that He has all power, not only in heaven but in earth. He is "able to make all grace abound." II Cor. 9:8.

"All glory to Jesus be given,
That life and salvation are free;
And all may be washed and forgiven,
And Jesus can save even me."

"Oh, the rapturous heights of His love,
The measureless depths of His grace;
My soul all His fulness would prove,
And live in His loving embrace."

CONCLUSION.

People are only responsible for the light they have. Considering the amount of light we have at this ripe age, the Christian experience and life should be a beautiful ideal.

The ideas advanced in this sermon may not accord with the way you have been taught and are prone to believe; but while I have been more dogmatic than I could have been in maintaining other doctrines we hold, I trust I have not worried you with any preconceived notions.

Some subjects are two-sided, but we can hardly conceive of the one we have been discussing as being two-sided, according to the second primary law of thought: "Nothing can both be and not be."

Passages of scripture may be found that will prove almost anything, according to the way we may fallaciously emphasize or isolate them. But wise heads have warned us not to found a doctrine on one or two isolated passages of scripture; and if we find two passages in the Word that seem to contradict each other, it is always best for us to ascertain the meaning of one, and afterward with prayer and sound rea-

son, bring the mysterious or ambiguous passage into harmony with the one we clearly understand.

BENEDICTION.

“The Lord bless thee and *keep* thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” Num. 6:24-26.

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