

THE SCOPE OF SIN

Scripture Lesson: Genesis 3:1-7

Text: Romans 3:10,12,23

Songs: R203

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

Think with me tonight about the size of the lot your house sets on. Or the number of acres on your farm. Both a city lot and farm have borders and boundaries. Ted Turner owns more of this globe than any other human being. Even his vast holdings all have borders and boundaries. The Federal government has large tracts of land that they call National Parks, National Monuments, even National Grasslands, Forests, and Seashores. We live in an area defined as Silos and Smokestacks. Yet no matter how vast the holdings, they all have borders.

Christians took that idea of borders and boundaries and put it into theology. They said in effect, "Here is the border of Christian living and here is where sin begins." In the first one thousand five hundred years of Christianity the church, the only one in the Western world at that time, the Roman Catholic Church, spent a lot of time on which activities were Christian and which ones were not. If you crossed the line, you had to tell the priest in confession before you came to Communion. There was a definite line between what the church permitted and what the church forbid, between what was considered right and what was considered sin.

Many Christians still look at life that way. They have a division between the sacred and the secular. They have behaviors that they embrace and behaviors they condemn. There is a defined line in their lives that they try not to cross. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if many of you here tonight think this way because it is such a pervasive way Christians have been taught to think. Christian living has a boundary and don't cross into sin territory.

That is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible never says that there is some corner of our life unaffected by sin. Instead the Bible is brutally blunt. We read it in our text tonight, "Romans 3:10,12,23." We also saw the source of our situation from our Scripture Lesson, "Genesis 3:7." Both the source and the situation we are in indicate that there is no boundary to sin. It penetrates and permeates our lives. We are sinners from the inside out and from the outside in. There really is no such thing in our lives that is fully spared. All of living, even by Christians, is sinfully secular. That is why taking one bite of the forbidden fruit sent Adam and Eve into a total tailspin. What connection could there be between eating and immediately feeling shame? Biologically and scientifically there is no connection. However, there is a deep spiritual connection. God created Adam and Eve as spiritual, religious beings. When they allowed disobedience to encroach their lives sin rushed into every nook and cranny. There was no area of their lives that was free from sin. That is why the Holy Spirit through Paul writes so boldly, "Romans 3:10,12,23."

Our spiritual forefathers followed the Bible. In the Heidelberg Catechism they asked a question about doing good. This is the answer that comes back which we read together tonight, "Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 91." How often is that we can combine true faith, God's law, and God's glory? Notice the contrast they make with the one thousand five hundred years of Christianity that established human rules of right and wrong much as did the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They say, "Not what is based on what we think is right or on established human tradition." The one crutch to which we might cling is that what we are doing seems right to us and to others. In reality if anything is done without one hundred percent true faith, with even a smidgen of being contrary to God's commands, or anything that appeals to our humanity is considered prideful, sinful, and faithless. By birth we are all in deep do-do. Sin makes us scum on the earth. There is nothing in ourselves for righteousness.

This has been known for centuries as “Total Depravity.” What is wrong with us goes to core of our being and permeates every part and every moment of our lives. Today we often call this “Fallen Humanity.”

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How important is that Biblical truth about our sin? The Bible begins with it. The Bible reinforces it by theological statements like Paul in the book of Roman. The Bible illustrates it by having even the most exemplary men commit serious sin. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Patriarchs, Israel’s best king, David, Jesus’ inner-circle disciple, Peter, are just a few of the blatant examples of serious sinners from the pages of the Bible.

It was our spiritual forefathers who did not want to see this Biblical truth about sin to be belittled or minimized. For two years, 1618 and 1619, they meet in a long Synod, that is a church meeting, in the city of Dordrecht in the Netherlands. The result was a foundational church teaching we call a “Canon.” This “Canon” is spelled with one “N” to distinguish it from the big guns used in war. Yet each Christian teaching “one N” Canon, whether associated with Dordt or any other location or time, is a theological “Cannon” defending the Bible and destroying Satan’s kingdom. The Canons of Dordt have become a powerful statement about sin, salvation, and security in Christ. We have known them by the acronym TULIP, and today more often use FAITH. The first letter of TULIP is “Total Depravity” and the first letter of FAITH is “Fallen Humanity”.

We are living in an era of the collapse of American culture and the Christianity so long associated with it. We are known as a “Christian Nation” though all of us admit our national sins prevent us from saying that with a straight face. We are likely less Christian than some countries in Africa and Asia. In this period of decline in our civilization and the drift from the core of Christianity religious leaders are calling once again for a return to TULIP and FAITH to bring us back to a Biblically based culture and church life.

Next week I will be going to Minneapolis to John Piper’s Pastors’ Conference. John Piper is pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church and a firm believer in and promoter of the teachings of TULIP and FAITH. Dr. Albert Mohler who is president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the largest seminary in the nation, requires every Baptist seminarian at every Baptist seminary to study the Canons of Dordt. While we tend to shy away from these doctrines that have defined us a people of grace, the Baptists are thrilled by the teachings and stress them in every one of their seminaries. Then comes the great surprise. The current Pope is also a firm believer in TULIP and FAITH. In fact, according to USA Today the Pope’s favorite seminary in the United States is Westminster West where conservative Reformed theology is taught in its purest form. “Sheet.”

Why do these Christian leaders take such an interest in Total Depravity and Fallen Humanity with the teachings that follow? Each of them is looking at the morass of Western culture exhibited in the unbridled greed of Wall Street, the masses who have been living beyond their means for years, and the politicians who passed laws that allowed conspicuous consumption to go on unchecked. They are looking at the moral bankruptcy of a people who slaughter their young before birth, allow pornography to be protected, who have higher standards for pets than people, and who have total disregard for their history or for God’s laws. Spiritually we are inert. We are living in the collapse of Western Christian civilization. A decade ago James Burtchaell warned about this disaster in his book The Dying of the Light, the catastrophe of severing Christianity from education. The only rescue of our culture is a return to Biblical Christianity as defined by the Canons of Dordt. That is why it is critical and crucial for us who have held this treasure for centuries to understand it, live it, and cherish it.

Dr. Phil is famous for saying you cannot correct what you do not acknowledge. Unless we first admit that there is a problem, we cannot fix it. That is why we must admit the scope of sin. Sin is not a light glancing blow to human life that affects us adversely now and then; sin vitiates our lives through and through. It is hauntingly real. That we must admit and confess before we can move forward to fashion a life of faith!

The great glimmer of hope is that the spiritual leaders of our time from the Pope to the leading theologian in our land coalesce around this great Biblical truth that we have preserved from the Canons of Dordt all these

years. To our shame, we have not honored it as we ought, at times even been ashamed to be associated with such an old document that teaches Total Depravity. The Holy Spirit refuses to have this truth of the Bible eclipsed. We acknowledge our sin so the Savior can do His thing in our lives and in our world. Hear about Him next week!