

✠ Okay... but what does that mean?

- **Tiny thought experiment: Think of a statement- concept- that is very important to your life- CENTRAL- that you know by heart, have discussed many times- AND YET, for you and everyone for whom this concept is just as central and important- there would be LOTS of differing thoughts for what it actually means.**
 - **DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”**
 - **OK... who is “all men”? Women? Citizens? What are these rights? Are they equally shared by all? What is liberty? What does it look like for a society to allow everyone, equally, the opportunity to pursue happiness?**
 - **IN CHRISTIANITY, there are concepts absolutely central to our faith- things we speak about all the time- hold to be true- but at SAME TIME may struggle to comprehend, even articulate, what they actually mean.**
 - **SO, when we come across concepts/statements like this, there’s a really helpful question we should bring to bear. OKAY... but WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? How is this truth fully understood, how is it worked out in the midst of everyday life?**
 - **BIG EXAMPLE- see in Colossians 1:13-14.**
- Colossians 1:13-14** *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*
- **FORGIVENESS! May be impossible to find another concept so absolutely central and essential to the New Testament and Christian theology. TREMENDOUSLY important. BUT....**

✠ So, what does it mean that, In Christ, we are forgiven?

- **I mean, think just a second.**
 - **How are we forgiven? What leads to this?**
 - **Is forgiveness incremental- we ‘have been’ forgiven, are we still forgiven now?**
 - **Why is it important that God forgives us? Is this just something about the future, or also now?**
 - **FROM WHAT are we forgiven?**
- **That’s the easy one, right? SINS! Paul just said it- in Christ we have the forgiveness of sins.**
- **OKAY- but what does THAT MEAN. If we really want to understand the significance of being forgiven, we need to take...**

✠ A step deeper: just what do we mean by SIN?

- **Surface level- almost cliché, very common- idea of**
 - **Missing the mark**
- **Idea that God is perfect, and sin is when we fall short of that perfection. May quote (out of context) Matthew 5:48, where Jesus says “Be perfect...”**

- **IMAGE** of bow and arrow- anything not bullseye in life is sin.
- At abstract level you can make this case- **BUT...**

Problem: *If this is how we primarily think about sin...our concept of sin may grow from being willfully disobedient to human failure in general.*

- You see, by definition, we fall short of God in everything, all the time. He is God, and we are not! This can make failure- even moral failure- sinful when we are sincerely and honestly trying (example of child learning to walk). Ultimately, Christian life comes to be defined by our sin and failure- which ironically dilutes rather than strengthening the concept of sin... if I'm sinning in everything, then sin tends to lose its meaning.

- A step deeper into meaning/emphasis most common in Christian culture and churches... **SIN IS**

- Moral imperfection

- Sin is when we violate God's moral teaching- the idea of 'morally negative thoughts and actions.' Sin is choosing wrong over right, bad over good.
- **NOW-** For this to be the case, we must have a standard for God's morality- definition of what right and wrong.
- **IN OT,** this is the **LAW.** 10 Commandments. Mosaic Law. Even today, we hold this up as a source of Biblical morality. 10 Commandments monuments...
- **PROBLEM,** is the law is the **OLD COVENANT,** and we live in the **NEW COVENANT.** We covered this in-depth back in Acts- Jerusalem Council- **REALITY** that now, **IN CHRIST,** the **OT law is no longer our source of moral teaching, moral 'rightness'.**
- **IN NT,** we turn to a variety of places where we see specific moral teaching- teaching of Jesus, other places where we have 'sin lists'. One is right here in **Colossians...**

Colossians 3:5-8 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.*

- **These thoughts and behaviors are morally wrong, so when we do these we are disobedient, we sin.**

Problem: *Sin isn't just choosing to do things that are morally negative, it is failure to obey God's commands that are morally positive.*

- **Not just choice to do what is wrong, it is failure to do what is right.**
- **HUMBLING TO** note that **NT** speaks more about the **GOOD** we are called into than it does the **BAD** we are called out of.
- **Important,** because when we define sin primarily in terms of behavior- can be tempted to deemphasize teaching that impacts us, and emphasize the teaching that impacts others. **LIKEWISE,** emphasizing moral prohibitions while minimizing **NT** clear teaching of what we **ARE** to do. Call to sacrificial service, to love our neighbors, to respect and live in obedience to our governmental authorities

- **BUT, TO BE CLEAR-** Scripture **DOES** contain significant teaching **BOTH** about what a morally obedient life **WON'T** look like and **WILL** look like. Both are important, and we may accurately describe sin as the choice to be disobedient to either.
- **AND YET, this is still an incomplete picture. NT also describes sin as the...**

- **Lack of faith**

Romans 14:23 *But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

- **Important context there! But if we explore this teaching it seems that what God is really after is faith and trust in HIM. A faithful yielded-ness that leads to a changed HEART, not just moral compliance.**
- **In this consideration of sin, we see the importance of conscience, and the somewhat unsettling truth that there may be things that are sinful for one person, and not another.**
- **THAT is a truth easily distorted if we are seeking to justify ourselves- and it points us even deeper to the origin of SIN ITSELF. The fall- Adam and Eve....**

- † **The essence of original sin**

Genesis 3:1-7 *Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”⁴ “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman.⁵ “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

- **SO- what was A&E's sin? (BTW guys, if we are of those people who claim that there's a woman to blame- Adam was RIGHT THERE). THEY ATE the apple. BOTH disobedient to God's command. Okay...**
- **WHEN that happened, what moral understanding did A&E have about right and wrong? NONE. The concepts of Good and Bad had no meaning.**
- **KEY- because original sin- and essence of sin today- is NOT MORAL CHOICE BETWEEN RIGHT/ WRONG.**
- **What we see is sin- AT IT'S CORE- isn't a question of what is RIGHT... it's a question of WHO IS GOD.**
- **A&E's sin was a FAILURE TO LIVE IN TRUST AND DEPENDENCE ON THE GOODNESS OF GOD. In that moment, they elevated the authority of SELF over the authority of God. They chose to trust in the wisdom of SELF rather than trust in the goodness of God.**
- **AND SO, TODAY, SIN – essence- is not failure to miss the mark of moral perfection. RATHER, sin is the choice to live in dependence upon our-SELF rather than live in trust and dependence in God.**
- **But what does THAT mean. What does it look like?**

† **Reality!** *To live in faith, trust, and dependence upon God- with Christ as our source of life in our mind, will, and emotions- will be to live, increasingly, in a natural obedience to the nature and character of God.*

- **AND SO, THE QUESTION-** what is the defining reality of God's nature and character, from which ALL god's other attributes flow? **IT IS LOVE!!!**
- **THEREFORE,** the essence of sin isn't just failure to measure up to the moral code of what is right and wrong- the essence of sin is a failure to LOVE.

† **A working definition of sin:** the condition of valuing my own wisdom and authority above God's presence, nature, and authority (*self-centeredness, 'the flesh'*) – which leads me to violate God's **LOVE** for myself and others. (*Be it for fear, anger, pride, jealousy, prejudice, self-protection, self-gratification, ignorance, etc.*)

Bottom line: *I sin when I violate God's love for His creation.*

- **KEY- this includes ALL PEOPLE- includes YOU. AND THIS BRINGS US FULL CIRCLE, BACK TO...**

† **Our great need of Forgiveness!**

- **HERE'S THE TRUTH-** we violate God's love for people **ALL THE TIME.** **AND** when we do, we cause **HARM.** We **HURT** people. Think of this.
 - **Injuries to the person impacted by our action**
 - **Injuries to those around them we may not see**
 - **This injures US. Hardens our heart, or brings guilt, shame. STEALS joy.**
 - **AND... injures- tears at- fabric of society. We see this manifested in our world today.**
- **When I dare consider TOTALITY of how I have caused harm through my violations of God's love... OH MY FRIENDS, I NEED TO BE FORGIVEN. SO DO YOU. WE ALL DO, in a way more profound than we can even begin to comprehend.**
- **I want to push into this a little deeper still- consider...**

† **A thought about judgment**

- **This may be biggest way we think about forgiveness- we won't face judgment and consequences of sin.**
- **But we need to hold on. Scripture DOES say we will face judgment. We all, believer and unbeliever alike, will give an account of our lives before God.**

2 Corinthians 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

Romans 14:10-12 *You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.*

- **THIS IS HUGE theological topic, and if it makes us uncomfortable, IT SHOULD.**
- **Share a thought from author I recently heard...**
- **Imagine being before God at judgment. In that place and time, God opens my eyes so that I see- even more- I feel, I completely experience and understand- what happened every time I violated God's love for another person. Every time I hurt one of his children.**

- *I think of that young woman walking down the sidewalk in Frisco about whom I made a snarky comment and judged her based on her appearance. She didn't hear me, but my condescension joined with the torrent of condescension she has faced from people she did hear, as all the while, like all of us, she is dealing with her circumstances, her brokenness, her confusion and fears, as best she can.*
- *Then, I was able to see every time my failure to love in my actions and inactions contributed to systems that violate God's love for people.*
- *And as I stand there, I'm overwhelmed with the crushing realization that there is no way, ever, that I can take that hurt away. That I can make it right. I would be done. Undone. Finished.*
- *AND THEN!!! In a scene/moment impossible to even begin to grasp, the voice of Christ comes to me. He's been right there all the time. And he says... CHILD- look at me- YOU ARE NOT CONDEMNED. I do not condemn you. In this place, NO ONE condemns you.*
- *FOR- on the cross, I bore upon myself the totality of the hurt caused by your sin. You don't have to bear this, because I BORE IT FOR YOU. CHILD- YOU. ARE. FORGIVEN. You have been, you are, and you always will be.*
- *NOT ONLY THAT You have been, you are, and you always will be- MY BELOVED. Come, and enter into my rest.*
- *OH my friends... this brings us to that absolute...*

✠ The miracle of redemption

- *You see, in the great hope of redemption, forgiveness isn't just removal of punishment. It's not just removal of the eternal consequence of sin.*
- *EVEN MORE, it is the removal of the barrier between US AND GOD.*
- *It is the miracle where Christ proclaims "NOT ONLY do I not condemn you, I have claimed you as my very own, my child, my beloved... I am making you NEW, giving you NEW LIFE, MY LIFE, and I am taking you as my bride, and you shall be one with me.*
- *There's a story in the Gospels- of a real person- that illustrates this beautifully... JOHN 8... A woman is caught in adultery, dragged before the religious authorities, who bring her before Jesus.*
- *Her accusers point to the moral code- "Moses commands us to stone such women." They were correct, although they left out half of verse- the half that also condemned the man to death. In any case, the law- the moral principal at hand- condemned this woman to death. But Jesus didn't stop at the principle. You know the story, don't you?*
- *Jesus said "if you are without sin, you throw the first stone." One by one, her accusers left. THIS IS STRIKING! Here is Jesus- the SINLESS son of God, defending this woman who is GUILTY of sin- against those confident in their religious authority to condemn her with God's own moral law. AND THEN..*

John 8:10-11 Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”
¹¹ “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

- **THINK OF THIS... “I do not condemn you”- That’s forgiveness. “Go and leave your life of sin”- that’s redemption. FOR WHEN WE LOOK BEHIND THIS STORY, the broader story of Jesus, we can know Jesus didn’t leave this woman on her own. Like so many others, she would have followed him, learned from him, started the journey of healing, acceptance, and restoration.**
- **Tradition holds that this woman was Mary Magdalene. The condemned woman, redeemed by Jesus, who would follow Jesus to the foot of the cross, where she witnessed the cosmic act of love making it possible for her- for you and I- and for all humanity- to be truly, and fully, redeemed. THIS STORY IS POWERFUL, because it is our story.**
- **One more thought- when we consider hope of redemption- this isn’t just about future of eternity.**

✝ Our hope for tomorrow is our reality today

- **BECAUSE we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins... TODAY:**
 - **The barrier between you and God has been removed. You are accepted. You are His beloved.**
 - **We may know FREEDOM from shame. Guilt.**
 - **Freedom from legalism, performance based acceptance.**
 - **Freedom to forgive others. To see others with the eyes of Jesus. Freedom from exhausting reactions of judgment and condemnation.**
 - **Freedom from fear- from being influenced and manipulated by fear**
 - **Because we are redeemed, because we are God’s beloved, we have entered into – released AND CALLED into the FREEDOM TO LOVE ourselves, and other people. To be- through how we live- the healing balm of the love of God bringing hope, peace, and restoration into our world, rather than contributing to its hurt.**
- **ALL of these are a journey. But the invitation, the gift, is very real. Friends, THAT IS GOOD NEWS.**

✝ Remembering

- **Close by remembering the act of love that made this possible. The cross, the death and resurrection of Jesus. (INSTRUCTION- keep and return to seat)**
- **Go with me to 1 Corinthians 11. Here Paul is writing the believers in Corinth, chastising them for missing the point about what the celebration of communion was all about. With what we’ve just discussed in mind, listen....**

1 Corinthians 11:17ff In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. ¹⁸ In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval. ²⁰ So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, ²¹ for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. ²² Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

– **Do we see what is happening here? In just a moment Paul will say...**

²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

– **In this context, what is it that was causing these believers to celebrate communion in an unworthy manner? What was it that Paul described as SINNING AGAINST THE VERY body and blood of the Lord? It was that they were FAILING TO LOVE! They were violating God's love for the people around them.**

– **But even to this church- and to us- Paul called them to REMEMBER the ultimate expression of God's love, and as we REMEMBER, that our hearts will be open to seeing- receiving- how God is working to grow- and show- this same love IN US.**

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

– **My friends, come to the table.**