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Doctrinal Outlines

SIN -- A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

I. Introduction

- A. "Sin is fun!" So scribbled the graffiti author on a decaying brick tenement wall deep in the slums of a large city.
- B. While the elements may soon wash these words from the masonry, false beliefs about sin, like this one, will long engrave the minds of millions of humans everywhere.
- C. Few people, graffiti artists and professing Christians alike, really understand the biblical doctrine of sin!
- D. This state of spiritual blindness is dangerous, for our Savior Jesus Christ gave His life to pay the penalty for sin.
- E. Surely, anything that demanded the life of God Himself must truly be a matter of life and death for you and me!

II. The Basic Doctrine

- A. In spite of the supreme importance of understanding what sin is and what it does, the actual biblical teaching about sin is easy to state in a few words.
- B. Sin is transgression against the way of God as defined by God's perfect law. Although the penalty of sin is death, forgiveness is gladly given by God to those who repent and accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and continue in God's way.

III. The Usual Teachings of This World

- A. Although the biblical truth about sin is easy to define (and, when fully understood, also deeply profound), nonetheless the veritable hodgepodge of human misconceptions about the topic is a nightmare of confusion.
 - 1. Some believe that there is no such thing as sin.

2. Others feel that sin is not sin unless the act in question "hurts somebody," or is against some sort of personal code.
3. Others include almost any and everything under the definition of sin -- such as all movies or even wearing any type of clothing but drab, all-black fashions out of the 17th or 18th century.
- RC 4. Others divide sin into various categories such as "original sin" and "mortal" and "venial" sins.

B. Truly, this subject needs to be made plain.

IV. The Bible Teaching

- A. When it comes to understanding the subject of sin, the Bible does indeed devote much time to this doctrine, and in the plainest words.
- B. For example, the Bible leaves no doubt about the definition of sin when it proclaims, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4, Authorized Version).
- C. This statement that sin is the transgression of the law goes a long way in dispelling many myths about sin, such as the falsehoods that there is no sin or that sin is only sin when it "hurts somebody" or transgresses your own personal code.
- D. It says plainly that sin is disobedience to God's law, period, regardless of intentions, beliefs or personal codes to the contrary.
- E. But sin in this context means far more than only a technical or in-the-letter violation of one of the Ten Commandments.
 1. It includes, as I John 5:17 states, "all unrighteousness."
 2. For we find that Jesus Christ expanded the law of God to include not only transgression in the letter (however broadly defined), but also transgression in the spirit and intent of the law (Matthew 5:21-28).
- F. Thus sin includes not only wrong actions we commit, but also the evil attitudes of mind and thoughts of the heart of every one of us.

- G. Since sin is the transgression of the law, it is obvious that there is no sin without law (Romans 7:7).
- H. God's law is in force today. That alone will come as a shock to many people.
- I. Yet, the law is not our enemy but our friend, even though it defines sin: "The law is holy...and just and good" (verse 12).
- J. This is because God's law exists not merely to provide meaningless dos and don'ts for God's amusement (like mere artificial rules in a board game), but to reveal and define to humans what actions and attitudes are harmful.
- K. Certainly, when we see how deeply sin can permeate each of our lives, we can easily see how "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).
- L. And yet, it is vitally important to realize much more about this subject of sin.
- M. For example, we must know that pure temptation, not followed by wrong actions or attitudes or thoughts, is by itself decidedly not sin.



1. It is plain that Jesus Christ Himself was tempted severely (Matthew 4:1), in "all points...as we are" (Hebrews 4:15), and yet did not sin.
2. Therefore we see that sin comes only when the temptation takes root in us -- "conceives" (James 1:14-15) -- and brings forth its evil results.

We must also realize that God is not the author of such temptation or its resultant sin.

1. Rather, Satan was the first sinner and is hence its author (Ezekiel 28:13-15).
2. And humans, in turn, sin when drawn away by the lusts of their own nature (James 1:14-15) or tempted by the unseen but powerful evil hand of Satan and his demons (Genesis 3:1-6, Ephesians 6:12).

O. Further, we need to be aware that sin came into the human race from Satan, but through Adam, the first man.

1. Nonetheless, we are all guilty of our own sins and not, instead, born with the sin of Adam staining

Every man is tempted as drawn by own lust. Therefore we sin. Sin = Death.

- us (as the teachers of the false doctrine of "original sin" would have us believe).
2. For, as the apostle Paul wrote, "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12, AV).
- P. Hence, the blame for sin belongs in two distinct places -- on Satan as its instigator and upon us as its willing participants.
- Q. Truly, this important lesson is the one taught by the symbolism of the two goats in the sacrificial ritual performed by ancient Israel on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).
- R. No discussion of the topic of sin would scratch its surface, however, without explaining the most important characteristic of sin -- its penalty. That penalty is the ultimate -- death! "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).
1. Such a direct and plain Bible statement may astound those who cling to the false belief in the immortality of the soul and who would think that the penalty would be to burn forever in hell fire.
 2. But God's plain and direct statement cannot be gainsayed nor doubted. "The wages of sin is death"!
- S. And notice that the wages is the same for all, great and small.
1. God does not categorize sin spiritually, calling some "mortal" and others "venial."
 2. All sin is mortal in the sense that it generates the death penalty if unrepented of.
- T. That is not to say that some sin is not more morally depraved than other sin, or involves more character destruction, or incurs greater bad results here on earth now. But the spiritual penalty for all sin -- the spiritual death penalty -- is equal in every case of sin.
- U. Yet the wages of sin are not only death, but include the suffering that such sin may bring in this life, such as broken marriages, wars and every other type of suffering, and the alienation and cutting off of the sinner from the living, eternal God (Isaiah 59:1-2).

- V. Certainly, we who have all sinned and therefore stand in jeopardy of suffering alienation from God and ultimate death, need an escape from and a protection and antidote to this horrible enemy of sin. Thankfully, we have it, through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:13-25).
- W. With all that has been said about sin, one question still remains: Why does God allow sin?
1. The answer is that sin is a natural possibility arising out of the freedom of choice -- the free moral agency -- God has given us humans.
 2. Since we have freedom to choose, we have freedom to sin. And we must have freedom to choose if we are to build the character God wants us to build in us, since character is by definition the choosing of right over evil.

V. Key Verses

Since the topic of sin is so vital to the understanding of the Bible, it is good to remember a few key verses on the subject. Here are some:

- A. I John 3:4 says sin is the transgression of God's law.
- B. Romans 6:23 shows that the penalty of sin is death.
- C. Isaiah 59:1-2 shows that sin cuts one off from God.
- D. Romans 3:23 states that all have sinned.
- E. I John 1:19 shows that God is faithful to forgive our sins when we repent of them.

VI. Conclusion:

- A. This subject of sin is too important to lie misunderstood in the minds of those whom God would call to salvation.
- B. Sin is transgression against the way of God as defined by His perfect law.
- C. Although the penalty of sin is death, forgiveness is gladly given by God to those who repent -- turn from sinning -- and who accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and dedicate their lives to living God's way, obeying His perfect law.

- D. Yes, sin may be "fun" for a while, but its penalty is anything but fun -- death!
- E. Yet we who can learn what sin is, and who bitterly repent of it, can rely upon the merciful forgiveness of the great God who yearns to give us His Kingdom and eternal life.