

Sermon for Sunday, March 5, 1978, by Donald M. Megahan, D.M., Associate Pastor
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"SIN IS FUN, BUT..."
Romans 6:1-11

As you all know, we are now at the midway point through Lent. In just three weeks we will be celebrating the greatest victory the world has ever known. Yet do you, as I, sometimes feel that the victory over sin has not been won? I say the victory doesn't seem to be won because what we see is so different. Every day, 365 days a year, the ugliness of sin messes up the lives of people everywhere. Doesn't that seem strange in view of the fact that Christ has made His life-changing power available? Instead of greater relief from sin, we seem to be getting in deeper and deeper. What is happening in America and around the world is bad enough. What concerns me, however, is much more personal. This is it: It is what we see happening in the lives of people who know Christ as their personal Saviour. In their lives sin still holds sway. In homes where Christ is supposed to be Lord, things are really messed up. Where lives are supposedly touched by Christ's transforming power, greed and selfishness are still top-dog. From all outward appearances it seems as though Christ's children are no better off than those who do not know Him. I tell you, something is drastically wrong.

If this sounds pessimistic and negative, I don't want it to come out that way. I simply want to be realistic, and this is why. At this time in Lent it will be helpful to take a long, hard look at sin. We must see more clearly why Christ had to suffer and die because of it. Sin is so destructive, so horrible, and we need to grasp fully how decisively Christ has dealt with it. To do this, we must be aware of another dimension of sin. It is the dimension of fun. Sin must be fun, or why do we seem to get such a big kick out of it? You must say sin is down right attractive, and it is fairly obvious that people would prefer sin to something better. Yes, sin is fun, but are the consequences of sin really worth it?

Which brings me to ask: How do you feel about sin? For that matter, what do you actually know about it other than that it is fun and also destructive? I wish we could take a Central Presbyterian poll on the subject of sin to see exactly where we stand. We could include such questions as: 1) Do you believe sin is fun? State the reason for your answer, 2) What do you believe are the results of sin?, 3) Are there degrees of sin and should sin be graded much as the Roman Catholic church does? 4) How do you deal with sin? 5) Are you certain you have been forgiven? 6) What does that forgiveness actually mean to you?

What answers would you give to such a survey? Where do you stand in regard to the problem of sin? Again, it is of concern that sin is so rampant and destructive in the world, but we don't have to probe too deep to find the reason. We know why many are so sinful. It is simply that they have not turned to Christ. That in itself is a real challenge, but there is something that is equally pressing. What about those who know Christ and yet keep plunging headlong into sin? How come we Christians have such a problem dealing with this issue? It is obvious that there is no easy answer.

Surely, this concern over sin is as old as Adam and Eve. Many in the Bible offered all kinds of help, but it was the Apostle Paul, who asks a very pointed question in our text. It is a question that frames the whole issue: "How can we who died to sin, still live in it?" Most of us might answer if we are flip, "That's real easy. We do it all the time." But Paul's answer has a different dimension. He points to an answer six chapters later, listen: "Hate that which is evil..." That's it. We must hate sin. Hatred for sin is a good starting point in dealing with it.

Because we don't have an intense hatred for sin except in someone else, we keep right on sinning in the same old way. Rather than hating it in ourselves we seem to enjoy every minute of it. We do this in spite of the fact that Christ died to save us--in spite of the fact that we have invited Him into our lives as Saviour and Lord. We do this and I wonder if we stop to think of how we are treating Christ. Each time we sin we are intimating that we love the sin more than we do Him. We act many times as though we have never had anything to do with Christ.

This accusation that we born-again Christians are very little different after we have Christ is no snap judgment on my part. It has been a growing conviction for some time and comes only after my experience from day to day. For instance, among Christians I see marriages going to pieces. There is disharmony and discord in their homes. Would you believe, some of them can scarcely tolerate one another. Just this past Tuesday I received a telephone call from a friend in another church, and she asked me to pray for a couple in still a different church. When I inquired about the problem, she said, "Their marriage is on the rocks." These are two people I would least expect to have marital problems. My first statement, after the shock wore off, was, "But I thought they were born-again Christians..." To which she replied, "They are, but that doesn't seem to make much difference."

That episode can be duplicated far too often in far too many churches. It is the old problem of the sin of self rearing its ugly head--the problem of not believing that the self has been crucified with Christ and not hating the sin enough to forsake it for Him.

I want to interrupt my train of thought for just a moment so I can make something abundantly clear. This is it: What I have said in regard to people with marital problems is not intended to use them as a whipping post nor am I pointing the finger at any particular person or any particular category as being worse than any other. That would be grossly unfair of me for two reasons. First, there are many homes where couples have a beautiful relationship and yet sin is too often king in their homes. We all know how true that is. Neither would it be fair, in the second place, because each separate instance where couples are having difficulty is unique and too complex to dismiss with a single and simple answer. What is true is an unwillingness to take seriously what Christ has done and is willing to continue to do. It is too easy to revert to the old, selfish way rather than struggle--and it is a tough struggle--to let Christ and the new way be in control. It is the old problem of taking the path of least resistance. It could be that we may even be happy with the way things are, though we would deny that again and again. It is actually saying one thing with our mind yet not wanting to sacrifice self enough to let Christ change us.

Hatred of sin, then, points to at least part of the answer. That's one of the keys, but it also poses a problem. This is it: How do you hate something which is so much fun as evil? For example, most of us know that one of America's problems is avoirdupois--obesity--just plain being fat. Yet, isn't it fun to have a big wedge of chocolate cake, coated with 1/2 inch of chocolate icing? Who can hate that cake even though we might be guilty of the sin of gluttony? Hating sin is far from easy. However, until we can come to the point of hating sin, we will keep on getting involved in it and reaping its destructive results. It is too much fun to sin, and we are not about to let loose of it even though Christ is in our lives. Hate is the answer--an intense hatred of sin that will cause us to do everything possible to get rid of it. Or better still, we must hate sin so much that it will turn our stomachs if we get involved in it. Such hatred will go a long way in solving the problem of sin.

Not only must we hate sin, but also we must realize that forgiveness is not easy. This does not mean that Christ is not ready to forgive us. He does forgive, quickly

and completely. However, from conversations I have had with Christians, I am afraid some of them make forgiveness too easy and thereby find it easy to sin. After all, if I know Christ is ready to forgive, I may slip easily into sin. When I know that after sinning, all I have to do is say I'm sorry and Christ will forgive, then I might not think twice before sinning.

How subtle a trap this is. It has been laid by the devil himself! Paul knew this and in our passage makes sin and forgiveness a life and death matter. He says, "For he who has died is free from sin." In other words forgiveness is costly. It costs our death to the sin. We must be willing to die to sin--to have it wiped out of our lives and forever laid to rest.

Naturally, this takes drastic action on our part--an action close to that of ridding our colon of cancer. When we learn we have cancer of the colon, we are shaken up and want something done immediately. When surgery is the course open to us, we don't hesitate to get the job done. We do this even though we know it will not be an easy thing to do. We know we will experience pain and suffering. Yet we don't count the cost of the pain. All we want to do is rid ourselves of the cancer.

This can be compared to what it costs to get rid of sin. As I said earlier we have to hate sin before we will give it up. But we will also have to go through the pain of having Christ incise it from our lives. Until we understand that such is the nature of sin and of forgiveness, how will we ever let Christ deal effectively with us?

Let me frame the problem in all this. The problem is that we have made confession too glib a process. It never really demands anything from us. We simply say, "I'm sorry," without planning to give up that sin. Oh, we might want to be forgiven and have the guilt lifted from us. But do we hate what we have done so much that we never want to do that sin again? This is the sure base for forgiveness. Before we confess we must be so sorry that we want that sin cut out of our lives drastically and completely. We must want that sin never to touch our lives again. That's what is at the heart of confession. We call it repentance. Repentance is the hatred of sin committed that demands and expects God to change our whole attitude toward it. The sin has become so distasteful that we can't stand it until it is taken out of our lives forever, never to come back again. When we repent we are saying that we will do everything within our power to give the sin so completely to God that we will walk away from it never to return to it.

So you see, receiving forgiveness is not an easy process if we are really serious about getting rid of sin. Since repentance is at the heart of forgiveness, I must be willing to die to that sin before I can expect God to forgive me. Anything less than this is what I call the "band-aid process." Rather than submitting ourselves to Christ's scalpel we are perfectly willing for God to patch us up with a heavenly band-aid. Forgiveness involves complete surgery.

Now add one more thought to this whole process, and it begins to come clear just how costly forgiveness is. Look ahead, if you will, to Good Friday. There you see forgiveness in the shape of a cross and on the cross One who was willing to die so sin could be dealt with. Certainly if it took the death of God's Son to break the power of sin, that puts a mighty high price on forgiveness. I can't think of a higher price to pay for sin than that, can you? Since this is true, how can we ever treat sin lightly or ever make a glib confession. To do so is to make a mockery of the cross and to reduce Christ's sacrifice to the lowest degree possible.

There is one more brief idea in this business of sin and forgiveness, and it is the heart and core of the whole matter. It is simply this: Which is more important,

Christ or sin? Paul states it this way: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." In other words, the choice is yours. Either know that you are dead to sin and alive in Christ or continue in your sin and be dead to Christ. It is a matter of what Christ said as reported by Matthew, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

It all comes down to one little word--love. If you love sin, you will continue in it. If you love Christ, you will live in Him. There simply is no middle ground. Again, listen to Christ as Matthew reports in his gospel account: "No man can serve two masters, either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other..." That's pretty plain. What we love we will bow down to as Master. If it is sin, we will get caught in sin's trap. If it is Christ, you will know the joy of the sin-free life.

So how do we resolve the matter? The Bible gives us an answer: "Let this mind be in you, which is in Christ Jesus." This means that we must center our attention on Christ. We are to think His thoughts. We are to do His deeds of love. As we consciously think of Christ and seek carefully to know His will, then our love for Him will grow. The more we love Him, the more our attention will be drawn away from sin. For isn't that always the way of love? Isn't it true that when a man loves a woman and keeps her at the center of his heart and attention that he will not have eyes for another woman?

So it is with us and Christ. The more we love Christ, the more we will hate sin, and the more we hate sin, the more we will love Christ. It is a law that will not fail. Try it. Give it all you've got, day in and day out, week after week, month after month, year after year, and you will come to know joy unspeakable. That's not my promise. It is Christ's.