

# SIN AND ITS EFFECTS AND CURE



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A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

*Sin and Its Effects and Cure*

Sin and Its Effects and Cure  
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## Welcome to *Sin and Its Effects and Cure*

Sin is the great tragedy afflicting the world. Its effects are universal, corrupting, and deadly. Sin is a slippery slope which, left unchecked, can bring ruin and destruction everywhere it reaches.

This is no time for being silent about sin, either in our own lives or our churches.

In this brief study we'll make the point that, sin being what it is, Christians must be vigilant against it, quick to expose and address it, and diligent in overcoming it through our Lord Jesus Christ.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Facing-Up to Sin

*Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.* 1 John 3.4

*... whatever is not from faith is sin.* Romans 14.23

### *Facing-up to sin*

These days it's not considered good form to talk about sin. Even the very word sets folks to cringing: "sin" – it just sounds so out-of-date, back woods, and judgmental.

In this age of tolerance, churches can try too hard to fit in, and this is what we see in many situations where speaking about sin is simply "not what we do." We want to accept everyone. We don't want anyone to feel like they're "on the hot seat," looked down upon, or condemned. We know we're all sinners, so let's just leave it at that, and focus instead on the more *positive* aspects of the faith.

But sin is the great tragedy of the human race. Not natural disasters, not terrorist movements, not nuclear or biological or environmental threats, not economic downturn, not political upheaval, not plague, not the cancellation of your favorite TV program – none of these compares with the tragedy of sin when it comes to adverse effects on humankind and the cosmos.

It's not hard to gin up a conversation about any of these contemporary threats or situations. But try talking with *anyone* about sin and see how far you get. For all I know, you may have already stopped reading by now.

But we're not doing anyone any good by ignoring this biggest elephant in the room. It's time we face-up to sin, recognize it for what it is and what it does, and consider the best ways of responding to this devastating and all-pervading affliction.

### *Sin as affliction*

And that's what sin is, at least in the first instance. Sin is an affliction – it's something that happens to us. Sin resides within us and grows seemingly of its own accord and corrupts everything it touches. Sin is a *spiritual* affliction that attaches to us from the moment of conception (cf. Ps. 51.5). Sin establishes us as enemies of God and all things good, from before we are born into the world. Sin darkens our minds, hardens our hearts, corrupts our consciences, and sets us on a path of self-interest from which we are helpless to extricate ourselves.

Sin happens, and it happens to every one of us. And, as we shall see, the presence of sin in our souls is not the only tragedy of sin, because sin in our souls brings ruin and corruption to everyone and everything around us.

Nothing in creation escapes the tragedy of sin.

### *Sin as rebellion*

But sin is not merely an affliction. Indeed, to look at us, you'd think sin wasn't an affliction at all, but a welcome condition, something we're resigned to endure.

For we are all willing participants in the tragedy of sin. By our refusal to live according to the commandments of God, and our efforts to contain faith to only a few select places in our lives, we confirm by our words and deeds that the sin which afflicts us is the condition we actually prefer.

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Sin in our souls comes to expression as rebellion against God and His Word – refusal to obey Him and reluctance to trust Him. Anywhere in our lives we disobey God’s will or think we know better than He, or anywhere we fail to look to God for guidance and help in life, we birth sin into the world and foist its effects on everything and everyone.

#### *Sinners all*

We’re all sinners (Rom. 3.23; 1 Jn. 1.8-10). Every human being is born into this world a rebel against God, and while we may downplay the true nature of that rebellion, and even act as if we’d like to have God as our friend, we’re only contriving to indulge our sinful self-interests and to make God our servant in a life of self-deception, degradation, and death.

And there is nothing any of us can do about this tragic situation.

Sin is the great human tragedy. And if we refuse to talk about sin or to deal with it appropriately, we’re only adding to that tragedy and making matters worse. Sin is a tragedy of enormous proportions, because it affects everyone and everything.

But sin, happily, is not the last word in this sad cosmos.

#### *For reflection*

1. Why do you think Christians these days don’t like to talk about sin? Is it because we aren’t sinners anymore? Or because sin is no longer a tragedy?
2. What do we mean by saying that sin is both an *affliction* and a *rebellion*?
3. Is it helping our walk with and work for the Lord to ignore sin, or to act as if it’s not a big deal? Explain.

*Next steps - Conversation: How would you explain to an unbelieving friend what sin is? Talk with some of your fellow Christians about this question. Then initiate a conversation with an unbelieving friend or colleague by asking him whether he ever thinks about sin.*

## 2 Silent about Sin

*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.* Genesis 3.8

*What's wrong with the world?*

Take a poll sometime with the people around you. Ask them simply, "What's wrong with the world?" and see what kind of answers you get.

In my experience, people will say "too much government" or "too little government," or "not enough educational or economic opportunity," or "too little freedom," or "too much violence," or just plain "selfishness." These are all variations of the same basic answer: We humans are what's wrong with the world. But these answers don't go far enough. Even among Christians, when I have asked the question about what's wrong with the world, very seldom has anyone replied, "sin."

Yet sin is *the* great problem of the world, because the presence of sin – this affliction and rebellion of lawlessness and unbelief – is present throughout the world, attaching to, corrupting, and destroying, like an out of control blight, all that is beautiful, good, and true.

From the beginning of sin's entrance into the world we can see its far-ranging and destructive effects.

*A Pandora's Box*

Genesis 3 records the rebellion of Adam and Eve and the entrance of sin as affliction to the world. It is the true record of sin's entrance to the world, as Paul affirmed (Rom. 5). To treat this account as anything *other* than historical is already to give way to sin.

Adam and Eve preferred to act as a law unto themselves rather than abide by God's Word, and to trust in their own ideas and desires rather than the good and perfect will of their Creator. By their rebellion and lack of faith, they opened a Pandora's Box of affliction that immediately spread throughout creation.

We can see from their experience, first, that sin *clouded their understanding of who they were*. Suddenly the man and the woman no longer accepted themselves as the image-bearers of God, complete and good in Him. They didn't like what they'd become and were ashamed to be present before one another as God made them (v. 7).

Sin also *corrupted their relationship*. Immediately upon their rebelling against God, Adam and Eve began to be at odds with one another. Blame-laying, jealousy, resentment, mistrust – all these and more rushed to set up shop in the hearts of our first parents, and have been passed on to all their progeny, down to this day (vv. 12, 16; Rom. 5.12).

Sin *corrupted their spiritual lives* as well, as we see Adam and Eve trying to avoid the Lord by hiding among the trees of the garden (v. 8). As sinners we prefer not to have the light of God's holiness shining on us, reminding us that we're not perfect, even though we prefer to think we're at least OK. We would rather God just go away and leave us alone; we'll figure out how to make the best of things without Him. We might not say it that bluntly, but this is how many of us, including many Christians, live each day.

Sin *introduced pain and striving* into the experience and aspirations of human beings. Pain in childbirth, striving with one another, knocking ourselves out and begrudging our having to work to make a living – all this is the consequence of sin's entrance into the world (vv. 16-19).

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The corrupting power of sin reached *even to the creation*. The ground reluctantly bears its fruit; creatures fear human beings; plagues and famines and disasters of various kinds threaten human wellbeing; and each is, at the end of the day, an expression of sin's impact on the world. The whole creation, Paul writes, groans and travails under the burden of sin foisted on it by our first parents and us, their offspring (Rom. 8.20, 21).

Further, sin *corrupts culture*, making it a tool for maximizing self-indulgence, vaunting human prowess, oppressing the weak, and mocking God (Gen. 4.17-24). Sin makes *society* a dog-eat-dog enterprise of all against all, nation against nation, every man for himself (Gen. 6.1-3).

We recognize the presence of all these problems in the world today. They're not the fault of government or culture or poor education or poverty or climate change. They are the consequence of sin, unrecognized and unadmitted, and continuing to ravage the souls of people and the world they inhabit.

#### *Silence is not golden*

Contrary to the old cliché, there is nothing golden in maintaining silence about sin. Refusing to talk about sin, to face up to its true nature and effects, and to resist it and eradicate it wherever it makes itself known will only ensure that the destructive power of sin will continue unchecked. Church leaders who do not take sin seriously betray their calling and their Lord, as well as the people they serve and the communities in which they exist.

Can we imagine the prophets of the Old Testament keeping silent about the sins of Israel and the nations? Or Jesus, refusing to confront the sinners of His day with the truth of God? Or Paul turning a blind eye to the sins that threatened the churches he loved so dearly? How can we presume to be heirs of the prophets and apostles and followers of Jesus, while we remain silent about sin? It's the height of folly and self-deception.

We must not keep silent about sin. Sin is a deadly spiritual blight infecting and corrupting everything. Ignored and unchecked, it transforms everything to rubbish. The longer we remain silent about it, the more certain will be the damage it inflicts. And facing-up to sin must begin with us (1 Pet. 4.17).

Sin is the problem, and the problem is everywhere. Wherever we encounter the effects of sin, we must be prepared to act against it. Failure or refusal to do so is simply adding to the greatest problem facing the world today.

#### *For reflection*

1. What does it mean for you to face-up to the sin in your own life? How should you do that?
2. What means or mechanisms exist in your church for helping people face-up to and be done with sin? Would you say that your church is like the prophets, apostles, and Jesus when it comes to speaking out against and dealing with sin? Explain.
3. How should Christians help one another to recognize, resist, and overcome the sin in our lives?

*Next steps – Conversation: Talk to some of your fellow Christians. Ask: How should we as believers deal with the sin in our lives? In our church? In our community?*

### 3 Effects of Sin: Denial of the Good

*Then those who kept them fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region. Matthew 8.33, 34*

#### *A source of evil?*

Sin is a real and present problem among the people of the world. It is the great tragedy afflicting all men and women, and the cause of humankind's incessant rebellion against God and His ways. Sin brings with it powerful effects, and we don't have to look too far to observe these. We see these effects, for example, in the way sin blinds otherwise well-meaning and intelligent people to the good that comes from knowing and following Jesus Christ.

British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell was not a friend of the Gospel. In his book, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, Dr. Russell opined that Christianity has been the source of more evil in the world than anything else. In the name of the cross, he explained, Christians have launched wars, oppressed minorities, enslaved millions, and deceived the masses. Perhaps if Christianity were to go away, the world would be a better place? Just like those ancient Gergesenes, who believed their community would be better off if Jesus would "depart from their region."

When Bertrand Russell thought about Christianity, all he could see were its evil effects, and he wanted nothing to do with it. If he saw anything good about Christianity, he chose to ignore it or rationalize it away. And because he found nothing to admire in the Christian movement, he found nothing to admire or desire in Jesus Christ as well.

This inability or unwillingness to see the good which Christianity has contributed to the world is evidence of the blinding power of sin. In our day, atheists, pundits, politicians, academics, and unbelievers in all walks of life are blind to the Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom. Increasingly, in the view of many, Christianity is not true and Christians are more a nuisance than a boon to the world. If we need to be reminded that sin is still present and flourishing in our midst, this is as good a place as any to start.

#### *The blinding power of sin*

Sin blinds people to the benefits that have come from the Christian movement – benefits such as Rodney Stark has meticulously outlined in his book, *The Victory of Reason*. People who refuse to see anything but evil when it comes to the faith of Christ simply prove the existence of sin and the power it wields in the souls of men. Sin blinds them to the good works Christ brings to the world and causes them to see only evil instead. Just like those people in Jesus' day. Jesus had done a wonderful, amazing thing for two members of their community. The report of it spread throughout the village, and everyone rushed out to see this One Who had done such a good thing for two of their neighbors.

When they arrived on the scene, however, instead of rejoicing for the good work done to their neighbors, they urged Jesus to leave. After all, a herd of swine had been lost! Economic downturn! Polluted water! Angry neighbors! Rumors and tumult and confusion! Who needs this?

Similarly, the religious leaders in Acts 5, while admitting that a "notable sign" had been accomplished to restore health to a lame man, they determined to silence the apostles and keep the good work from spreading (Acts 5.15-17). How blind can you be?

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People whose souls have been darkened with sin will see the world through sinful eyes. Even the Good News of the Kingdom of God will appear to them to be a bad thing, threatening their autonomy and fun; and they'll make it their business to spread their distorted view of the faith to anyone who'll listen.

We in the churches are not helping such people when we refuse to acknowledge the effects of sin in our midst or to address these consistently. The Gospel is Good News, good news which can only be properly understood against the backdrop of the bad news of sin. By downplaying the reality of sin and its many effects, we deprive ourselves of the many good benefits to be gained through repentance and obedience, and we reinforce the unbelieving world's view that Christianity, if not a source of sin, at least provides sin a safe harbor.

#### *Truly Good*

Yes, certainly, there is much in the history of Christianity – and in our churches today – with which to find fault. But overall, as Rodney Stark and others have explained, Christianity has been the source of more good in the world by far. Under the influence of the Gospel the lives of untold multitudes have been improved. Dignity and worth have been restored to women and the poor. Slavery was condemned and eliminated wherever the reach of the Gospel was known. Education has been extended to the masses. Universities, hospitals, markets, democratic governments, works of art, literature and music, business enterprises, charitable agencies, mission efforts, and churches by the thousands have brought salvation, hope, literacy, material support, purpose, delight, and love to people in every nation, tribe, culture, and tongue.

Those who refuse to acknowledge such readily available truth about the goodness that comes from knowing Jesus are simply blinded by the sin of their own hearts. And the fact that many such people exist in our day is just one of the powerful effects of sin.

The people of Jesus' day sinned by sending Him away. They were more concerned to preserve their *status quo* than to explore the mystery, wonder, and power of the new life He came to bring, and with which He had endowed the last, the lost, and the least of their community.

If we need evidence of the power and tragedy of sin, all we have to do is listen to the ways sinful people distort the obvious facts about the faith of Jesus Christ. Sin is still at work in our world, and it doesn't do our neighbors or us any good to maintain silence about it. Denying their sin, they deny the goodness of God as well, and this should serve as a warning to us in the church about the danger of not facing-up to sin.

#### *For reflection*

1. How has the Gospel brought good into your life? What would you say to someone who said Christianity was a source of more evil than good?
2. Meditate on 1 Peter 2:15. What are the implications of this for your own Personal Mission Field?
3. What does it take to open blind eyes to the truth that is in Jesus? What is our role in this?

*Next steps – Conversation: Ask an unbelieving friend: How much do you know about the contribution Christianity has made to the wellbeing of the world? Be prepared to share some of your own observations about this matter.*

## 4 Effects of Sin: Gospel Opportunities

*But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name." Acts 4.15-17*

### *Not going away*

The tragedy of sin is not going away any time soon. Preachers and church leaders who refuse to talk about sin are only allowing more space for it to grow and to wreak its devastating effects in the Church and the world.

Do we need more evidence that sin is still *the* great problem facing the world? Shall we consider more of the effects of unacknowledged and unchecked sin? Not only do many of our contemporaries deny that Christianity has been a source of much good in the world; they'd actually like to see the faith put out of business.

Or at least, confined to a more limited place and role in society.

This has been the case in every generation since the earliest days of the Gospel. There are always those who, blinded by sin and determined to be done with God, work to eradicate or at least control the spread and influence of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The Roman Empire mounted ten successive waves of persecution against the Church in an effort to stop the spread of the Gospel. Tyrants and oppressive governments have followed suit in every age. Still the faith advances.

Even in the face of the abundant evidence of Christianity's positive contribution to the world, there will always be those who want it confined or silenced. Otherwise, why the first amendment to the U. S. Constitution?

### *Hardened against the truth*

The religious leaders who tried the apostles Peter and John in Acts 4 did not lack evidence that Christianity is a power for good. Right before them was the lame man who had been healed in the name of Jesus Christ. They admitted to one another that this was a "notable miracle." Nevertheless, they resolved to stop the spread of the Good News.

The Good News was not good to them because it threatened their place in society and their presumed right to determine how people should act and whom they should serve.

We mentioned that one of the effects of sin is that it attaches to our souls, hardening hearts and minds against God and His truth in order to preserve the soul's claim to autonomy. People in whom sin continues to hold sway simply do not want God telling them what to think, how to feel, or what they can do. You can parade before them all the reports and records of the abundant good Christianity has brought to the world, and they'll still be looking for ways to shut you up.

In our day, the freedom to worship and serve Christ has again come under assault. We're familiar with contemporary efforts to chip away at Christianity's role in shaping culture and society. This is just the latest phase of a never-ending effort on the part of certain people to silence the Word of God. Christianity has been removed from the public schools of the land – for the beginning of which they provided a significant

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impetus. The faith is locked out of the corridors of political power – even though Biblical ideas and a Christian consensus helped give shape to the founding documents of our nation. Christians are told where they can and can't preach, and what they can or can't say when they do preach. Legislation and court cases are routinely introduced to try to force Christians to act against their convictions and conform to the demands of a secular state.

And in other parts of the world, more violent and extreme measures are taken to silence the followers of Jesus and the message of the Cross.

*No time for silence*

On every hand we see the evidence that the Gospel opposers of old are still seeking to shut down or fence in the faith of Jesus Christ. The hardened hearts of sinful human beings can be seen in just about every sector of our culture and society, and it will not help the cause of the Gospel to ignore such evidence of the power of sin by remaining silent about this greatest of human tragedies.

This is no time for being silent about sin. But we must not zero in only on the sins of those outside the household of faith. We must always remember that facing-up to and dealing with sin must begin among the members of the Body of Christ.

The Gospel is only Good News when it is seen against the backdrop of sin – how sin blinds us to good, hardens our hearts, and invites us to make up our own rules about right and wrong, truth and good. And how trying to live this way, apart from the grace and truth of God, routinely blows up in our faces.

The proper way to respond to those who oppose the Gospel is by overcoming the sin that lingers within our souls and proclaiming the Good News which alone can break the hold of sin on our world.

*For reflection*

1. What evidence do you see that people today would like to eliminate or reduce the influence of Christianity in society?
2. Only the Gospel can soften hardened hearts. Does this mean we should *not* use *every* available means to shore up our freedom to proclaim and believe the Gospel? Explain.
3. Why is it important that Christians and their churches be consistent in facing-up to and dealing with sin?

*Next steps – Conversations: Do you feel the pressure – anywhere in your life – to keep quiet about your faith? Where? Why? How should you respond? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.*

## 5 Effects of Sin: Keeping God at Arm's Length

*... although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened... who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.* Romans 1.21, 25

### *A curious phenomenon*

As apparently many Christians see it today, evangelizing the lost is a hopeless enterprise. "People just aren't interested in the Gospel. They don't want to hear it." We consider that their sinfulness has put them, to some degree at least, in opposition to the Gospel, and they don't want us coming around trying to cram our religion down their throats.

So we oblige the very people who need to hear it most by keeping silent about the Gospel.

Where does this leave us? In the churches we keep silent about *sin*, thus allowing the effects of sin to fester unchecked. And in the world we keep silent about the *Gospel*, which is the only cure for sin, thus allowing the effects of sin to fester unchecked.

And we wonder why the world is in so much turmoil?

It is true, of course, that many people in the world are doing their best to keep God at arm's length. They stay away from church. They don't want to talk about religion. They never read the Bible. And their minds and hearts are taken up entirely with things secular, sensual, and material.

Is this because they find more satisfaction and fulfillment in *avoiding* God than in *believing in* Him? How would they know?

### *Religions all*

The fact is, everyone worships some kind of god. Paul says if people will not worship the God of the Bible, they'll worship some god of their own devising. Which, at the end of the day, means they're worshipping themselves and the deity – the idol – they've erected as the object of their most fervent desires and efforts.

Why do people do this?

The answer is simple: sin. It is one of the effects of sin that people prefer a god of their own devising to the God Who reveals Himself in Scripture. Another way to say this is that people think they know better than God what's best for them. You and I felt that way once, and, if we're honest, we slip into that mindset from time to time even now. Many people prefer their morality to His, their way of living to that which is prescribed in His Law, and their view of truth to that of Scripture. And it's sin that leads them to make such choices.

Rather than acknowledge and worship the God of the Bible Whom they all know, Paul insists – since God has clearly made Himself known to them – people will turn in their sin-blinded condition to create some deity, some idea of the "good life," to which they attach themselves.

Even though that deity is only the product of their own minds, offers no security against death, continually leaves them frustrated and looking for something more, is routinely out-performed by the deities other people embrace, and shape-shifts each time they seem almost to have it within their grasp, still, this false god allows them to keep the true God at arm's length, and this is the objective, after all.

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Everyone is religious. Everyone worships something. If people, blinded by sin, will not worship the God of the Bible, they'll worship some god of their imagination. As a result, as Paul explains, "even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them" (Rom. 1.28-32).

And they do this because they will not worship the one true God. If ever we needed evidence for the power and tragedy of sin – and for the tragedy of our twin silences regarding sin and the Gospel – surely this is it.

### *Look at it this way*

But there's another way of looking at this situation. Paul says all people know God, because God is continually revealing Himself to them through the things He has made. Apart from God, Paul writes in Ephesians 2.12, people have no hope. They set up these false deities – wealth, leisure, sex, fun, whatever – and pursue them with a vengeance. But each time they seem to realize the hope of their self-made religion, it fails, leaving them wanting something more.

We *could* point out to these folks that their frenzied life of frustration in pursuit of the god of their own imaginations is the result of sin. We *could* show them, from Romans 1 and elsewhere, that the downward spiral into futility they feel their lives are becoming is the result of keeping God at arm's length, preferring instead the false god which they've made up in their own minds.

Then we *could* tell them the Good News that this God – Whom they know but deny – loves them so much that not only has He surrounded them with steadfast love and faithfulness in spite of their rebellion, He sent His Son to die for their sins and open the way to true and eternal life with Him.

We *could* do this. We *could* help them escape the tragedy of sin and its consequences. But before we will, something about our own views of sin, the Gospel, and the needs of those around us is going to have to change.

### *For reflection*

1. Paul says everyone knows God at some level. What evidence would you cite in support of that claim?
2. Everyone is religious in that everyone chooses a god to worship, an idea of the good life to pursue, and an accompanying ethic by which to live. And all this is an act of faith. Why is it important that we understand this?
3. What are the "twin silences" of the Church, and how can we begin to overcome them?

*Next steps – Conversation: What do you think are the primary obstacles preventing people from telling the Good News to others? Talk with some Christian friends about this question. How can believers help one another be more consistent in sharing the Gospel?*

## 6 Effects of Sin: The Slippery Slope

*Surely You set them in slippery places;  
You cast them down to destruction.* Psalm 73.18

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre*

In his 1919 poem, “The Second Coming,” Irish poet William Butler Yeats envisioned the world spiraling away from its master and perch, deaf to the call to return home and headed on a course of dissolution and oblivion.

He might have been explicating Paul’s teaching in Romans 1.

As we saw previously, when people flee their perch on the arms of God – when they deny Him Who makes Himself clearly known to them – then they’re on their own, and they will enlist some deity agreeable to their thinking and desires, even though this is nothing but the product of their own best ideas.

The result, Paul says, is that God allows them to go their way and do their thing. He “gives them up,” the apostle writes, reluctantly and gradually, to a downward spiral of sin, degradation, corruption, and death.

They’re on a slippery slope, and they either don’t know it or think they can tread it safely. It’s our duty to warn them of what lies ahead.

You may find, as you share the Gospel with the people in your Personal Mission Field, that some will indicate they’re not really interested in Jesus or His offer of forgiveness and eternal life. That, they might suppose, will be the end of the matter.

But before the conversation ends, ask permission to explain one more thing. Say to your friend, “I know you won’t agree with this, but I want you to understand where, according to Scripture, your refusing God’s offer leaves you.” It is important, in sharing the Good News, that we help people see what the Bible says about where they stand, as long as they reject the offer of God’s love in Jesus Christ.

Most people will humor you and allow you to continue. And so you should.

*Lost and getting “lost”*

First, say to those who reject the offer of the Gospel that the Bible teaches that they are still in their sins. There’s that problem again, that tragedy of sin. Apart from Jesus Christ there is no forgiveness of sin, no power against sin, and no ability to atone for sin by one’s own efforts. Sin doesn’t go away just because we refuse to deal with it. All who reject Jesus remain in their sin.

Then you’ll want to ask, “Do you understand what the Bible teaches about where you are with respect to your sin?” Don’t expect them to *agree* with you; you just want to make sure they *understand* what the Bible teaches. Our duty is to make the Good News clear, in all its facets. God will do with His Word what He chooses (Is. 55.10, 11).

Next, explain that this condition is going to get worse. Because they’re still in their sin and have rejected the only power Who can extricate them from sin, the power of *sin* is going to increase in their life. In fact, you could confidently tell them in the years to come, it’s not unlikely they will find themselves doing or thinking or desiring things that today they consider to be distasteful, undignified, or downright dirty.

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People trapped on the slippery slope of sin are caught in that downward spiral where, because they will not listen to the voice of God, they will be dragged by the quicksand of the spirit of the age as it cycles downward toward the ultimate drain of degradation and death.

So tell your friends, “You’re still in your sins, and it’s going to get worse.” They’re lost and they’re going to get, well, *lost*. Think of all the times Ezekiel told this to the people of Israel in his day. And why did he do it? So that when this actually began to happen, and the people became aware of it, they would know that God is Lord and His Word is true.

Finally, you’ll want to tell them, “If you continue in your sin until death, you will spend eternity beyond the grave in miserable separation from God, with no hope of liberation from despair, corruption, and the consequences of your chosen path of unbelief.” Then say, “I know you don’t believe this; but do you understand it? Do you understand where dying in your sins will leave you? Do you understand what the Bible teaches about sin and its effects in your life?”

#### *A slippery slope*

We want people to see that, like Asaph explained in Psalm 73, sin is a slippery slope. No solid footing exists for those who think to make their way in life following their own best ideas about truth, goodness, morality, and happiness. One sin leads to another, leads to another, leads to more. We will sin then lie to ourselves, then sin without so much as even thinking about it. And this happens because sin has real power to destroy our will to do what our consciences dictate, what we know to be right (Rom. 2.14, 15).

Look, if someone was heading down a treacherous hillside from which you had been rescued – by the help of a gracious and redeeming Savior – wouldn’t you warn them against it? Wouldn’t you tell them it’s a slippery slope, and that there’s only one way to safety and sure-footing?

Of course you would. Then why do we continue to remain silent about the slippery slope of sin? And why do we hold our tongues when the Good News of the Gospel might give the people we know a hand-up off the slippery slope that leads to death?

#### *For reflection*

1. Have you identified and begun working your Personal Mission Field? Watch this brief video ([click here](#)), then download the worksheet that goes with it and get started.
2. Why is sin like a slippery slope? What makes it that way? Why does this make it so important that we check sin – recognize, expose, and resist it – as soon as we become aware of it?
3. Why is the knowledge of sin and judgment an integral part of the Good News of Jesus Christ?

*Next steps – Conversation: After you have mapped out your Personal Mission Field, share it with a Christian friend, and ask your friend to pray for you as you begin working your Personal Mission Field.*

## 7 Overcoming Sin

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* Romans 12.21

*More than words*

I don't want to give the impression that the tragedy of sin is something that can be overcome merely by beginning to talk about it.

That would be a start, of course, but it's only part of a broader strategy we in the Christian community must adopt if we hope to overcome the evil of sin with the Good News of the Kingdom of God. We have to start talking about sin, beginning in the household of faith; and we have to get back to talking about the Gospel, both to one another and to our unsaved neighbors. We must proclaim the Good News, and we must do so against the backdrop of the bad news that everybody knows about, but no one seems to want to name.

Jesus Christ is the only cure for the tragedy of sin. We cannot extricate ourselves from its grip, nor escape the slippery slope. But Jesus can lift us out of the snares of sin into a new life of Kingdom power for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). We who believe in Him know this, and so we must live and proclaim it to others, or they will continue to be without hope and mired in the downward spiral of sin.

At the same time, however, we need to give attention to two other aspects of a strategy for overcoming the evil of sin with the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom.

*Be good*

First, we need to deal with the sin in our own lives. We need to be open and honest before God, every day, as He searches us by His Word and Spirit to reveal any lingering sin in our own lives (Ps. 139.23, 24). If we harbor sin in our lives we will not enjoy the fellowship or favor of God (Ps. 66.18), and without that, we're as vulnerable to the tragedy of sin as the most hopeless soul we know.

At the same time, we must strive toward the mark of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3.14). The Spirit of God is working with the Word of God to transform us into the image of the Son of God (2 Cor. 3.12-18). We must work out our salvation (*out* not *for*) in concert with Him, applying ourselves to the disciplines of Scripture, prayer, fasting, repentance, and daily obedience. Regular, faithful, and increasing use of these disciplines will enable us to refract the resurrection life of Jesus into our own life spheres.

Only if we are the kind of people who are striving to become more like Jesus will the words we speak on His behalf have anything like the power they did when He spoke them. We must work hard to *be* good, to be people in whom Jesus is being increasingly formed (2 Cor. 3.12-18), at the same time we make the most of every opportunity to *speak* the Good News.

*Do good*

And if we are *becoming* more like Jesus, then we'll *do* those works that actually represent and express Him. We will treat others with the dignity and respect they deserve as image-bearers of God. We'll learn their names and use them as often as we can. We'll take a genuine interest in others, become good listeners, practice the art of winsome conversation, and look for ways to serve people by our affirming words and thoughtful deeds. We'll follow the teaching of God's Law as it directs us in the specific details of how to love our neighbors.

We have been rescued from the tragedy of sin by our Lord Jesus Christ so that we might do good works, thus showing the world that power exists to overcome the ways of selfishness and sin with self-denial,

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consideration, kindness and love (Eph. 2.8-10). Jesus promised that people would glorify God for the good works they experienced through us (Matt. 5.13-16). Each of us as individuals, and every community of believers, must consider how to stir one another up for love and good works, and we must not grow weary in this high and holy calling (Heb. 10.24; Gal. 6.9, 10). We are a people created for good works (Eph. 2.8-10). We must study God's Word to become equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17). We must be zealous and ready for good works, and careful to maintain them diligently in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities (Tit. 2.14, 3.1, 8). Only thus will we overcome the tragedy of sin with the glory and joy of good works.

#### *Rewriting the tragedy of human life*

The tragedy of sin will continue until the Lord returns to make all things finally and entirely new. But that tragedy doesn't have to be the last word for every member of the cast. Just as the Lord has worked in our lives to overcome evil with the Good News of forgiveness, hope, and life, so He can work in the people of our day. We must be willing to talk about sin and to recognize and deplore its terrible effects. And we must hold out the Gospel as the Light against which the darkness of sin cannot possibly prevail (1 Jn. 2.8).

If we will speak the Good News out of lives that are good and *do* good, we may find that the Spirit of God is pleased to use us to rewrite the tragedy of sin in the lives of many people. When the final curtain drops on the tragedy of sin, let's make sure we've done our best to ensure that everyone to whom the Lord sends us has at least had the opportunity of considering a different script for their lives.

#### *For reflection*

1. Why are Scripture and the Holy Spirit so vital for helping us to overcome evil with good?
2. How can you improve your use of spiritual disciplines so that Christ increases in you and you are zealous and ready for good works?
3. How can Christians encourage one another in this calling to overcome evil with good?

*Next steps – Preparation: Make a copy of the PDF of this series. Share it with some fellow church members, and invite them to join you in a discussion of the main points of this series.*

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*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. Why do we say that sin is a tragedy? Can anything be one about it?
2. Are we wise in not paying more attention to sin in the church and in our own lives? Explain.
3. How can you see that sin is having deleterious effects all over the world?
4. How can we overcome evil with good?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.