

**Is Sin Irrelevant?** Intro Sermon  
7 Deadly Sins Rom 7:14-25

What is humanity's greatest, most common, most powerful addiction? It has many forms. Some are simple and others complex.

In the bulletin insert, Definition E says sin is when we replace God with something or someone, and the result is an addiction of spirit. There is an attraction at the spiritual level every bit as powerful as sexual attraction at the physical level. We cannot produce our own meaning in life, our own worth, and our own security. Spiritually speaking, if it's not God who is the source of our meaning, then we are in bed with something else and miss the kind of joy that only Jesus Christ can offer.

I encourage you to work on your own definition of sin – and see what the Bible says about sin. Because unless we understand what sin is:

- in its simple clear ways;
- in its more complex ways;
- in it's personal, interpersonal and community ways;
- in the war between God and Satan,

we can't fully grasp how much it affects and pollutes us and this fallen world.

A couple of years ago I was talking with a relative who is not a Christian. We were discussing political candidates and were generally in agreement about them. But then I said that to me some of their positions and actions are sinful. My relative replied, "Sin? Sin isn't relevant. That's an old fashioned idea." This kind of thinking makes one wonder how this person and others who think like this, set their ethical criteria and make decisions. If we don't believe there is a God, who sets some ethical and moral standards, is there sin in this world?

A question I have is: Do we understand what sin is and its effect? A former United States Senator wrote, we are defining deviancy down. He was ringing an alarm about what he saw as a dangerous social unraveling as a result of our

redefining and accepting certain behaviors as normal, rather than doubling down on traditional standards of behavior.

A sociologist wrote, the amount of deviant behavior in society has increased beyond the levels the community can "afford to recognize" and that, accordingly, we have been re-defining deviancy so as to exempt much conduct previously stigmatized, and also quietly raising the "normal" level in categories where behavior is now abnormal by any earlier standard. This redefining has evoked fierce resistance from defenders of "old" standards, and accounts for much of the present "cultural war". (Erickson)

In another view, Kirk Devine says, "I believe that we're living in a time where acceptance plays a big part in our society. We are living in a time where everybody is looking for an excuse to do what they want to do. We're living in a time where everybody wants the green light to act according to their will and their way. We're living in an 'anything goes, just let it flow' society. We want what we want so bad, that we'll do just about anything and listen to just about anybody to get it."

People have been saying things like this in each generation. But this time it seems more real. We are living in a changing culture and are not sure how to help connect people with Jesus Christ and His standards. The Church has spent a lot of time, and rightly so, talking about God's grace through Jesus Christ. But I think we need to spend time recognizing what sin is. We also need to recognize how our culture is changing and how it's changing us.

For example, MTV did a special in August 1993 on the 7 Deadly Sins. They interviewed various well-known entertainers from the music and television industry. You would recognize many of the names. These well known persons pretty much all agreed these were not vices and the list was "dumb." If you don't think this kind of attitude isn't influencing our families and us, and our society, please think again.

So we are starting a series on the 7 deadly sins over the coming months. We could go in all kinds of directions with such a broad topic as sin, but today I want to talk about sin as a root addiction that affects our lives.

The Apostle Paul tells us, “For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”

A bewildered woman went to her pastor and said, “I don’t understand what is happening. After becoming a serious Christian I felt free of resentment. For a while I loved everyone. Since I had committed my life to Christ I felt sure that I had been healed forever from resentment of a cousin. This cousin used to do some things that before my conversion irritated me almost daily, and I would resent her continually. But recently when she was to come to visit, I vowed that I would remember my commitment to God not to resent her, and I asked for his help.

The woman continued. “I promised God that I would not resent this woman, repeating to myself, with all sincerity, ‘I will *not* resent her. I will **not** resent her. I will **NOT** resent her!’ But when she walked in my front door and said, ‘Hello,’ I was suddenly filled with resentment.

I was baffled. I saw that I had wanted her to be different & she wasn’t. I hadn’t meant to resent her. I was like an alcoholic promising not to drink. I wanted to change my behavior, but I seemed to be in the grip of a strange compulsion to try to get this cousin – & everyone else – to be the way I wanted them to be.” (p. 41 Sin)

This woman had good intentions. She was purposeful in trying not to sin. She had prayed about the relationship and asked God for help. But the compulsive nature of sin showed up.

Have you ever had a similar experience? I do what I do not want to do.

It’s in our human nature to downplay this addiction of doing what we don’t want to do. I remember studying sociological / psychological experiments where the people being tested were much less critical of their own behavior than when they were looking at similar behavior in others. My sins or mistakes aren’t as bad as someone else’s. Or at least I have a good reason for doing what I do, but others don’t. Don’t you catch yourself doing the same thing? Are you as critical of yourself for some actions as you are of other people?

Or are you like me? Rose misplaces her keys at times & I get irritated. I think I very seldom do that! But when I lose my keys, it’s because of... I have a good reason! I’m not as bad as her!

The prophet Jeremiah declared, “The heart is more deceitful than all else; And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?” (17:9)

I think we are living in increasingly dangerous times. It would be easy to think I’m referring to economics, or terrorism, or politics or natural disasters, or crime, or any other fear that is on your mind. And there is reason to be concerned in all those areas. But I’m talking spiritually.

There has been sin since the world was created. The Bible and the Church have mentioned sin a lot. There was lip service and recognition given to sin. Maybe too much at times. However it seems the church and society is moving away from recognizing and naming sin as sin. One reason is we don’t want to embarrass or hurt people, which is good. We want to be politically correct and liked. But the outcome of ignoring sin and its consequences without naming it as sin, is harmful. Especially since there is no call it repentance or restitution.

Another illustration of our changing culture is this story. When Pastor Joe Wright was asked to open the new session of the Kansas State

Senate, everyone was expecting the usual generalities, but this is what they heard.

“Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask Your forgiveness & to seek Your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, ‘Woe to those who call evil good,’ but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values.

“We confess that:

We have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your Word and called it Pluralism;

We have endorsed perversion and called it alternative lifestyle.

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.

We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare.

We have killed our unborn and called it choice.

We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable.

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem.

We have abused power and called it politics.

We have coveted our neighbor’s possessions and called it ambition.

We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.

We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers & called it enlightenment.

“Search us, O God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free.

Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent to direct us to the center of Your will, we ask it in the name of Your Son, the living Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Now I know this kind of prayer can and should be critiqued by each of us for a variety of reasons. And for Joe Wright, the response was immediate. Some Kansas Senators walked out during the prayer. But within 6 weeks more than 5,000 phone calls were logged with only 47 of them responding negatively. International requests for copies of the prayer were received from India, Africa and Korea. Paul Harvey aired this pray on the air and received a larger

response to this program than any other he had ever aired.

The point is, despite our various theologies, philosophies, experiences, and relationships, I think we sense that the world is both more wonderful and worse than it has been in the past. Something is going on besides what we see and hear. And I think at least part of it is denying and downplaying sin. Even being offended when sin is mentioned.

Jesus warned, “For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.” (Matthew 13:15)

To close I offer four illustrations. Two are in your insert. May we not be slow learners about sin and its effects. May we not flirt with sin.

Here is an urban legend but it makes for a good story. There was a couple who owned a python almost from birth as a pet. It grew to be very large. They did not put it in a cage so it was free in the house. The couple started to become concerned when the snake stopped eating. All the snake would do is lay around and occasionally it would slither onto their bed and stretch its body out.

They finally decided to take the snake to the veterinarian because it would not eat anything, even its favorite meals. The doctor did a thorough exam and turned to the couple and said: "You need to get rid of this snake immediately. It has been refusing his food because it's getting ready to eat you. When it stretches out he's measuring how tall you are and if he can fit you in his body."

Satan and this world are always tempting us. Sin has a cost. We do what we do not want to do. It's in our nature to try to down play what sin is. Sin always has a price no matter how much it makes us feel good at the moment. We all have a compulsive addictive spiritual disease where we repeat self-defeating

behaviors that injure ourselves and the people around us. Scripture tells us, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Is sin irrelevant? Not if we want the joy only Jesus Christ can give us. We dare not downplay the reality of sin – or its results.

To close I want to leave you with this story. When Leonardo da Vinci was painting The Last Supper, he looked for a model for Christ. At last he located a character in one of the churches of Rome who was lovely in life and features, a young man named Petro Bandinelli. Years passed and the painting was still not finished.

All the disciples had been portrayed except Judas Iscariot. Now Leonardo da Vinci went to find a man whose face was hardened and distorted by sin and at last he found a beggar on the streets of Rome with a face so villainous he shuddered when he looked at him. He hired the man to sit for him as he painted the face of Judas.

When he was about to dismiss the man, he said, "I have not yet found out your name." "I am Petro Bandinelli", he replied. "I also sat for you as your model of Christ." The sinful life of years had so disfigured the once fair face of the young man that it now looked as though it were the most villainous face in all Rome.

Sin has a cost. We do what we do not want to do. It's in our nature to try to downplay what sin is. Sin always has a price no matter how much it makes us feel good at the moment or how much we try to justify it. We all have a compulsive addictive spiritual disease where we repeat self-defeating behaviors that injure ourselves and the people around us. We dare not ignore or dismiss sin. Scripture tells us, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Is sin irrelevant? Not if we want the hope and joy only find in Jesus.