

Seven Deadly Sins
Adam & Eve: Where Sin Begins

Genesis 3:1-7

The serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

²And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

⁴But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened – they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

And so sin entered the world spoiling the good creation. Adam and Eve cut the moorings of the ship of human history. The ship was set adrift and everyone ever since has been born at sea, lost, far from home.

We're starting a sermon series today on the 7 Deadly Sins. Perhaps, as you survey this famous list, you may have already started attaching names and faces of people you know who excel at these sins... or you see these sins in your own life.

Now, I've wondered a bit how you might react to the news that we'll be spending several weeks on the topic of sin.

You might say, "oh, Steve... you know that we know we're sinners – it sounds so discouraging to think about spending week after week talking about all the things I know aren't right about me."

Or, you might say, "Oh, that is just so typical – all Christians can think about is what's wrong with the world. Christians are so judgmental... so quick to point out what's wrong with everybody else. Christianity is so pessimistic... so doom and gloom. C'mon... get out a little and look on the bright side."

Maybe you respond vigorously... with a fist pump... "Yes, preach it, preacher... make it hot. Rain down fire and brimstone – people don't have a clue anymore what sin is. Dangle us over the pit... make us smell the smoke and taste the sulphur. Make us afraid of hell."

I suppose that there's at least one smart aleck here who thought, "Oh, did you mean that only 7 sins are deadly? – that means I don't have to worry about all the other 400 million sins... they're not as lethal as I thought they were."

Too many of us here are indifferent to sin. You might have said, "Oh, come on... what's the big deal – sin is just the way things are. We can't help it. It's just a part of being human, so don't make such a big deal about it. I'm pretty sure God just wants us to do the best we can and not worry about our mistakes."

I suspect that there are some of you who are terrified by sin. It looms large in your mind and presses so hard upon your soul you can hardly breath. It grips you and paralyzes you, and you see no hope, no light, no power to live with the freedom God has promised. You count each of your faults, and you see no way that God can love you. You see no hope for change."

Some of you grieve – you are humbled in sorrow as you are honest before the face of God

So, why Sin? Why these 7 sins?

This list of sins comes to us first of all from the Scriptures. They have been recognized as a group from a very long tradition in Church history. Augustine had a hand in the early stages of the tradition as he reflected on life, holiness, and the process by which God transforms us. In the Medieval Church, Thomas Aquinas reflects on this group of sins. There is underlying this list the discipline of reflection – reflection both upon God's virtues and God's making us like himself. That is, laying aside the old way of life and learning to embody the virtues of God himself. So, part of the process was being clear about what our sins are and how we wrestle with them. There are plenty of

lists of sins in the Bible. Some of the Apostle Paul's lists are long indeed. These 7 recur rather frequently among these long lists – in part, that's what helps them make the short list. But in a way, there is practical wisdom about this cluster of sins. It's similar to the 10 commandments.

10? Who are we kidding. There are way more than 10 commandments. But the 10 inscribed by God's hand on the sheet of stone Moses lugged down the mountain... they are an essential and effective summary of how God calls us to live. Doing the 10 does not exempt us from anything else God may ask of us, but in an essential way, these 10 are inevitably connected to everything else.

So, it seems with these 7. These are frequently where we find ourselves at odds with God. So, we're looking at them as a helpful way of summarizing the whole of our human experience... and I think we'll admit, when we look them over... Pride, Greed, Lust, Gluttony, Envy, Wrath, and Sloth... we'll agree... yeah, that pretty much covers most of the real estate of sin in my life.

But I'd like to begin by suggesting to you that all of them... all of our sins, our actions and our desires, are ultimate expressions of one dynamic at the center of all that is not God in our lives. Sin is the degodding of God, to borrow a title from DA Carson. At the center of all that is not God in our lives is idolatry.

Idolatry sounds like such a pagan word, doesn't it. Idolatry is what the unenlightened heathens do. And for many of us who have grown up in the West, the idea of having idols of stone and wood, faces of creatures staring back at us from an altar or a shelf... is hard to imagine. Yet, as East has met West in the past couple of generations... whether it be rocks, or totems, or buddahs, or phones... objects invested with power that invite trust have become familiar to us, common. But all of those objects are merely superficial symptoms of a reality that is as old as human history. Idolatry.

We are people made in God's image.

Every one of us here has been made to worship.

In fact, it's something so deeply embedded in our humanness that none of us can not worship. It's like Bob Dylan used to sing, Ya gotta serve somebody.

You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride

You may be a city councilman taking bribes on the side

You may be working in a barbershop, you may know how to cut hair

You may be somebody's mistress, may be somebody's heir.

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes

You're gonna have to serve somebody,

Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord

But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

Sin is idolatry

Sin is loving anything in place of God

Sin is giving your loyalty and allegiance to anything other than God

Lust, Greed, Gluttony, Sloth... All these are ways that we love self more than God

But many things we call virtues can easily work the same way

Hard work... honoring your parents... excellence... sacrifice...

Are not all these good things?

Perhaps

For those of you who are students... for those of you working diligently at your jobs, for those of you laboring over the jots and tittles of theology... the truth is that these can be deadly virtues that are masks for deadly sins.

As we see sin enter the world in Gen 3, we see already that sin changes how we look at God, ourselves, and the world. The lens by which we make sense of the world begins to shift. Our idea of how the world should work, like Satan's lie, is always a mixture of truth and error. We cobble together this mixture into ideologies that we hold up as ideals or as solutions. But these ideologies that we embrace are all forms of idolatry. David Koyzis has written a wise and important book called *Political Visions & Illusions*. He looks at a number of common ideologies: liberalism, conservatism, capitalism, socialism, nationalism, democratism, individualism, utopianism. They are all idolatry. How do you know? They all have a salvation story. They all promise to save the world.

And, none of them deliver.

Think for a moment about our text this morning... the record of the day sin polluted the whole of creation. It feels, doesn't it, like the pristine glory of the new made world lasts but a moment. But now, this fallen world is all we know. We've not known the world any differently than a world stained by sin. Yet, in God's mercy, sin does not extinguish his glory or his image – sin does not undo the goodness of creation even though everything is marred, bent. Nothing that we know is all that it should be. Yet, even marred, it is full of wonder. The seraphim in Is 6 sing: The whole earth is full of God's glory. The closing line of the Psalter is the invitation for everything that has breath to praise the Lord. The Creator/Redeemer speaks through Isaiah: "Sing for joy, you heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, you earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees." (Is 44:23; 49:13) Of this glory in creation, the poet Gerard Manly Hopkins describes the world as "shining like shooed foil."

Now, while we often need to be reminded that the world is good, no one needs to persuade us that the world is not as it should be. Think for a moment.

What is it that drives much of education and business and families and art?

It's the energy to make things better, to heal, to fix, to change, to improve, to put things to right.

And after thousands of years of human history... we're not there

If we think of sin in merely behavioral terms, we make lists – do this, don't do that. We're tempted to reduce the world to machinery... and God is the mechanic doing his best to keep the engine running

Now, make no mistake, our sins are the choices we make and the things we do.

But sin is not simply our mistakes or even our disobedience. It is those things.

If this is the only way we think of sin, then we'll be tempted to think of God as if he's some cosmic puppeteer.

Sin is our doing again and again, day after day, what Adam and Eve did by committing the first human sin. They are faced with glory, goodness, God himself... and they turn away. We, as they, say “no” to grace.

Here’s the power of Sin – it makes us discontent with paradise.

Adam and Eve have everything – they lack nothing (except the knowledge of evil), yet they looked... and they liked... and they took.

In an important sense, there’s nothing extraordinary about what they did.

You and I do the same thing every day. We turn our backs to God and his grace and generosity, and we say to God, You will not be God – I will be God and take your place.

I will tell you what is right and wrong

I will tell you what is good and evil

I will tell you what is true and false

When we view the world through the lens of our ideologies and through the eyes of our idolatrous hearts, it’s easy for us to play God... to look across the troubled landscape of the world and think we are above it, detached from it... that we are somehow not a part of the problem. There is the apocryphal story attributed to GK Chesterton who when asked, “What’s wrong with the world?” replied, “I am.”

Neil Plantinga in his excellent book, “It’s Not Supposed to Be This Way: A Breviary of Sin,” puts it this way:

Self-deception about our sin is a narcotic, a tranquilizing and disorienting suppression of our spiritual central nervous system. What’s devastating about it is that when we lack an ear for wrong notes in our lives, we cannot play right ones or even recognize them in performances of others. Eventually, we make ourselves religiously so unmusical that we miss both the exposition and the recapitulation of the main themes God plays in human life. The music of creation and the still greater music of grace whistle right through our skulls, causing no catch of breath and leaving no residue. Moral beauty begins to bore us. The idea that the human race needs a Saviour sounds quaint.

Here’s what I’d like us to consider this morning

Sin really is about turning our back on God and seeing ourselves as God in his place. But of course, we have only to look around there’s not a human in sight who embodies all of God’s glory and perfection. Yet, we persist in the self-deception, the self-induced hallucination that we are God.

If that’s true, then the antidote for sin is another way of seeing, another way of making sense of the world beyond our favorite ideologies.

I want to suggest that if we hope to put sin behind us and cease living as idolaters

We need God’s grace to open our eyes. For Jesus to put mud on our eyes and have us wash that we might see. But what should we look at if we are going to abandon idolatry and put sin behind us?

The Puritan Thomas Chalmers preached an extraordinary sermon called The Expulsive Power of a New Affection. Not Explosive... Expulsive. But his point is very

simple, a deeply Augustinian idea – we sin because we act on what we love. The only way for us to stop sinning, is for the love of sin to be displaced by a greater love.

I want to suggest that we see 3 things that I think will help us cultivate that greater love... and we'll see these things by God's grace

1. The beauty of God
We see his glory and are drawn to him and to be like him
2. The tyranny of sin
We see the terribleness of sin, its destructive power and we are convinced that we need the power of God to deliver us
3. The triumph of Christ.
We see the end, so we live with confidence that sin does not get the last word. The Lamb wins.

I. The beauty of God

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. (Ps. 27:4 ESV)

Christian with desire fell sick

Bunyan has him quote from the Song of Solomon, "If you see my beloved, tell him that I am sick because of love."

Isaiah – his glory filled the temple, the weight of which crushed him almost to death
2 Cor 4:17 – the weight of glory

This is the beatific vision

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

(1 Jn. 3:2-3)

Notice the connection between beauty and holiness

Where do we see the beauty of God?

1. in his Word – the truth that we learn about him... being captured by the immensity, enormity, the grandeur of who he is. Not as we have imagined him to be... but as he has revealed himself to be. David says that it's his greatest desire to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. Central to seeing God's glory

and being captivated by his beauty is by inquiring... by the study of this window into the very heart and person of God.

2. Again, David says that it's his greatest desire to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. God's beauty is visible in the worship of those who love him. We come to the written Word to meet the living Word. And in his mercy he presents himself to us each Sunday in his body, his flesh and blood in the Eucharist. Even here in this humble building on Station Road, the beauty of God is here as his presence and character are reflected in the gathered assembly of those who worship. When Paul warns his brothers and sisters in Corinth about coming carelessly to the Eucharist, he warns them about a failure to discern... an unwillingness to see... a blindness. God is here... not only in the elements, the bread and the cup, but in his people who represent his grace and glory... and it is no small thing to go through the motions of celebrating his grace if we are blind or indifferent to what he has accomplished in the lives of those who bear the glory of his saving grace. He calls us to see, to discern the Body. Do we know the stories of grace in the lives of the people we sit next to or share coffee and cookies in the fellowship hall.

3. We see the beauty of God in his Word, in his worship... and we see his beauty in his world. As the hymn writer says, "He shines in all that's fair." If we are detached from the world, if we do not hold the world in our hands as a gift from the Creator, we are blind to his beauty. Not only those of you who are artists, but all of you who create and make order and sense of the world... whether it be by unraveling the mysteries of atoms or mathematical formulae, or whether it be by knitting or gardening, athletics, sculpting, words, shaping the lives of children... You handle sacred stuff, because the beauty of the Creator shines in all that is made by those who bear his image.

4. But supremely, we see his beauty in his very self. When we gaze into the face of Jesus, we see the beauty of God. We are wise to spend much time in the Gospels, for there we see Jesus and hear his words. We hear the testimony of those who touched him, heard his voice, ate with him, betrayed him, were healed and forgiven by him. He is the living beauty of God. Here is the matchless beauty of one who loves us so much that he laid aside his glory to be born as one of us... and who laid his life down for us that we may be like him... that we may bear the beauty of God unspoiled forever.

So, the first way of seeing that cultivates that greater expulsive love, is to see the beauty of God.

II. The tyranny of sin

The second way of seeing is to see the tyranny of sin.

Again, Neil Plantinga helps us. He writes:

"God hates sin not just because it violates his law, but more substantively, because it violates shalom, because it breaks the peace, because it interferes with the way things are supposed to be."

Sure, we can think of sin as our living contrary to God's rules, as disobedience. It is that.

But, in a much more profound sense, sin is what convinces us to abandon everything our hearts really long for... shalom, things as they are supposed to be. Sin convinces us to turn our back not only on Paradise, but on the One who loves us more than we will ever know. Sin deceives us into trading freedom for slavery, heaven for hell.

Literature, books, and films are replete with stories that end badly. Just like many of the stories in the Bible. The Jezebel story ends badly – her body thrown from the tower, her head smashed on the stones, food for the dogs. The Judas story ends badly – betrayal and suicide. Some of the stories in Judges are so horrific that we don't read them to children. Several years ago we had a Chesterton House movie night discussion – we watched the film, "A Simple Plan." In the opening scene 3 brothers trudge across a field of unbroken snow, pristine, white. They find a downed plane with huge bags of money inside. They agree upon a simple plan – they'll keep the money until someone claims it. But you know already, don't you, that it's a bad plan. By the end of the film, the brothers have turned on each other. There is blood on the formerly unbroken field of snow as sin devastated their lives. The Bible does not let us read about only Hallmark happy endings. We need to know and see the destructive power of sin.

Kathleen Vohs in presenting the data from a recent study at the University of Pennsylvania says that meaning transcends the self while by contrast happiness is all about giving the self what it wants. Roy Baumeister, the lead researcher of the study behind the book, "Willpower" writes, "What sets human beings apart from animals is not the pursuit of happiness, which occurs all across the natural world, but the pursuit of meaning, which is unique to humans."

Now, these researches are not writing from a Christian point of view, nor are they talking about the biblical view of meaning. But underlying their conclusions is the basic difference between sin and righteousness – happiness... or idolatry... which promises meaning through self-fulfillment can't deliver on that promise. Meaning is found by focusing outside ourselves, and doing what God does for us – by giving ourselves away.

The pursuit of happiness is idolatry that ends in tyranny... in slavery, not fulfillment and freedom.

So, when God calls us to live righteously... when he calls us to follow his law, he's not asking us to satisfy him... to just dance to his tune because he's God and gets to do whatever he wants... and he gets some perverse pleasure out of telling us about all our failures.

He calls us to turn our back on sin by loving righteousness and true freedom more – he wants us to be whole, at rest, he wants us to be all that he's created us to be, and our obedience to his law is our way of learning to live in the world made new... our way of

learning to long for shalom. His bonds are freedom, and if love for shalom is to displace our love of sin, we must see sin as a tyrant not a liberator, as a destroyer not a healer.

The first way of seeing that cultivates that greater expulsive love, is to see the beauty of God.

The second way of seeing that cultivates that expulsive love is to see the tyranny of sin.

III. The triumph of Christ

The third way of seeing that cultivates that expulsive love is to see the triumph of Christ.

Satan and sin are no match for him.

He crushes the head of the serpent in the resurrection.

The enemy is defeated, and we need not fear him even when we arm ourselves to endure him in his violent death throes. We sing with Luther, “his rage we can endure”

The woman caught in adultery is brought by her accusers to Jesus – they want permission to stone her. But at the end of the story, Jesus rises from drawing in the dirt, there are no accusers – she is alone with Jesus, and she stands alive, forgiven. So too when Jesus rises from the dust of death on the 3rd day – there are no accusers. In him we are alive and forgiven.

All that God’s holy covenant demands of those who would stand before him... every jot and tittle has been fulfilled by Jesus... and he gives this righteousness to all who ask for it in faith

All that God’s holy covenant demands of those who have turned their backs on him, who have betrayed him, denied him, been disloyal to him... rebels against him... every drop of justice due our sin has been borne by Jesus... the scars on his back, in his side, upon his brow, in his hands... rich wounds yet visible above. The words he screams in agony from the cross, “My God My God why have you forsaken me” These words come from his lips so that they need never come from ours. “It is finished.” His work is done.

What shall we say to these things. this is a panorama, a vista so grand, so massive, it can’t be captured by a mere Instagram freeze frame. If you and I think about the finality and certainty of what Jesus has accomplished for us, What shall we say?

If God is for us, who can be against us? No one!

If God did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Who can bring any charge against God’s elect? No one! It is God who justifies.

Who can condemn us? No one! Christ Jesus has died – he was raised and is at the right hand of God interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? No one! Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-9:1)

His ultimate certain victory begins to shape our lives as we begin to apply his victory to our confrontation with sin.

There is in seeing the triumphant victory of Jesus... the love of Jesus poured out in his death and resurrection... when we think long, and contemplate the wounds of Jesus, his sacrifice... there is kindled in our soul that expulsive love that will displace all other loves. As he has loved us, by his Spirit we learn to love in return.

Death, and sin, and the old way of life begins to fall behind us

And the virtue of God becomes sweet to us – it is the beauty of God, the sweetness of all we were meant to be, and it is the love of Christ overflowing in our thoughts, words, and actions.