

What Should I Say?
(Talking About Jesus in Everyday Conversations)
“Part 2: Talk About Sin”

Gen 3:1-19; Romans 7:14-16; Romans 6:23

~ **Delivered at Central Baptist Church on January 14, 2017 by Steve Edelman**

Have you been in a conversation in which someone believes they are good person? They don't see sin in their own life. They don't believe there is a need to be transformed by the power of Jesus. I have heard people say things like, "Listen, I am a good person, I have never really hurt anyone, and I try to do my best. I send money to the poor, I have helped my little sister do her homework, and I even try to be charitable. I do not go to bed at night thinking about which puppy I would kick the next day or who I would rip off. What gives Christians the right to call me sinful?" What do you say?

We just started a new series on **“What should I say? Talking about Jesus in everyday conversations.”** Today we are on part 2 of this series. Our focus will be “How to talk about sin.” It is based on the fact that Jesus commanded his people to go and speak the gospel, or good news, to the entire world. Christians are to engage in spiritual conversations with people and tell them the good news about Jesus. In our Western World, it's best that these conversations happen organically and that we don't force them.

Many Christians struggle to respond to the culture's questions and how to define sin in a tangible way. When it comes down to it we are not sure what to say. The purpose of this series is to equip you to have God conversations with people. More specifically, the goal is to answer the question, “What is sin?” or “What's wrong with humanity?”

As we talked about last week, there are two basic ways we can approach this. One way to define the gospel is to simply tell the big story of the Bible. Usually we tell this in four parts: the creation of the world, the fall into sin, redemption through Jesus, and the future restoration when Jesus returns.

The other way to understand the gospel is to talk about four themes: **1. Who God is; 2. What's wrong with humanity; 3. What Jesus has done; and 4. How we need to respond?** God, sin, Jesus, and our response. This is how we are going to develop this series.

Today is part 2 and I am going to shape this message around three questions: First, **how do you explain sin to an unchurched person?** Second, **what are some of the misconceptions of sin?** Third, **how do we know when someone is ready to respond to their sin?**

1. THE DEFINITION OF SIN.

2. THE MISCONCEPTIONS OF SIN.

3. THE RESPONSE TO SIN.

In order to talk about Jesus in everyday conversations, we must be able to communicate the key concepts of sin to our current culture. First, let's look at - the definition of sin.

1. THE DEFINITION OF SIN.

I admit that we have not done a very good job at explaining what we mean by sin and the sinful nature of humanity. Again, we need to start with the beginning and, as we talked about last week, creator God. Note: The Bible talks about a **beginning** (God created everything good), **middle** (Man rebelled against God), and an **end** (Jesus will fix all that is broken).

As a side note, I want to point out that we should be looking for these types of God centered conversations. We should be listening to what God is telling us as we engage others around us.

Doug Pollock says, "Nothing creates an opportunity to talk about God faster than Spirit-led listening. When we demonstrate that we are truly seeking to understand people, not simply trying to change their points of view, we create a safe environment that allows them to open up at a deeper level. As others feel genuinely understood, they also begin to better understand themselves." **Once God has opened an opportunity, here are some ways in which we can have conversations about Jesus.**

The first way to in which we can define sin is that:

a) Sin is our rebellion against God. (Gen 3:6)

At the core of sin is a rebellion of God that pushes Him away. We all reject God as ruler by trying to run life our own way without him. Let's look at how this began.

Look with me at Genesis 1:31 which says, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” Jumping down to Genesis 2:16 which says, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*”

*Jumping down to verse 5-6. “But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. **For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.** So 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.”*

Notice that Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God started with a desire to be like God and take his place as king.

Adam and Eve weren’t just violating some silly rule, “Don’t eat the fruit.” They were doing something much greater and much more serious. **They were rejecting God’s authority over them and declaring their independence from him. In other words, they were declaring that they don’t need God in their life.** D.A Carson says, “In all the universe, there was only one thing God had not placed under Adam’s feet— God himself. Yet Adam decided this arrangement was not good enough for him, and so he rebelled. But their spiritual life, the one that matters most, ended immediately. Their fellowship with God was broken, and thus their hearts shriveled, their minds filled up with selfish thoughts, their eyes darkened to the beauty of God, and their souls became sere and arid, utterly void of that spiritual life that God gave them in the beginning, when everything was good.”

God had told them if they lived life by rebelling against God they would “surely die,” which meant above all that they would be cast away from his presence and become his enemies rather than his friends and joyful subjects (Gen. 2:17). But they didn’t care. Adam and Eve traded their favor with God for the pursuit of their own pleasure and their own glory. **At the core of sin is a desire to fulfill earthly appetite over what God wants for us.** The Garden of Eden had provided all the delicious sustenance they needed (Gen 2:15-17). **Sin is a rejection of the will of God and a**

desire to be independent of Him. Sin entered man and the separation began to widen.

Scripture says that Satan had been the most exalted angel ever created by God, that God had created him to rule as the highest of all created beings. His particular reign and rule for God was over the earth and the universe, over the physical and material world and dimension of being. But Satan did the same thing that all men have done: he sinned and fell. He began to look at himself, and he began to want to live the way he wanted instead of the way God wanted. He wanted ...

- to rule and reign over the universe in his own way
- to rule without answering to God
- to possess the ultimate authority over the world
- to be the supreme ruler of the earth and physical universe

In rebelling against God, we make a mess not only of our own lives, but of our society and the world. The whole world is full of people bent on doing what suits them, and not following God's ways. We all act like little gods, with our own crowns, competing with one another. The result is misery. The suffering and injustice that we see around us all go back to our basic rebellion against God. By not doing things God's way it causes all kinds of problems and devastation such as abuse, murder, starvation, homelessness, poverty, and a host of other natural disasters and social ills. In addition, man finds his own heart and even the hearts of nations filled with evil - the evil of greed, prejudice, selfishness, lust, immorality, pride, hatred, assault, murder, war, bitterness, drunkenness, lying, cheating, and stealing.

If you want to go deeper, sin is defined in modern day terminology in what we call humanism. Humanism is the belief that man himself is the ultimate being in the universe. There is no God, no supreme being who rules over man and the universe. Man or woman is their own authority who determines their own destiny. They maintain control and rule over both themselves and nature. Humanism declares that man himself is his own supreme being.

ILLUSTRATION: What happens when a four-year-old tries to rule his or her parents at the grocery store. It never goes well.

However, when we put ourselves above God, we need to understand that we are all rebels, because we don't live God's way. We prefer to follow our own desires, and to run things our own way, without God. This is how God defines sin. As we have seen, we need to explain that sin is **a self-sufficient rebellious attitude that separates us from God.**

The next way we can define sin is our betrayal against God:

b) Sin is our betrayal against God. (Gen 3:8-12)

In relational terms, sin is a betrayal or a turning your back on a loving relationship that was offered. It rips God off by not responding to him. It refuses to let him have the kind of mutual and unrivalled love-relationship he offers us as our Creator and Savior. Betrayal steals or breaks our relationship with God.

Look with me at Genesis 3:8, *“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, **and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD** God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”*

Notice that Adam and Eve once walked and talked with God on a regular basis. They enjoyed a vibrant loving relationship with God. Listening to a lie caused them to turn their backs on God. As a result, they hid themselves from God out of shame because they betrayed God. In verse 11, God confronts Adam and not Eve for their actions.

Look with me at Genesis 3:11, *“¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”* What happens next, Adam also blames/betrays his wife for what happened.

At the core of sin is a desire to fulfill an earthly appetite that you are willing to turn your back on God to get it. Sin is turning our backs on God to embrace or love something else over God. The Garden of Eden had provided all the delicious nourishment they needed (Gen 2:15-17). More importantly, our relationship with God and His ways are better than anything the world can offer. When the affections of our heart love something over God, it's an act of betrayal. Sin is the de-goding of God. For

man to reject the Creator is an act of betrayal and sin. This act separates man from God.

ILLUSTRATION - TWO CHAIRS THAT REPRESENT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

As we have seen, we need to communicate that sin is a betrayal that breaks our relationship and connection with God. Sin replaces God with a created person, object, or desire. Sin rips God off by denying him the absolute loyalty and obedience and glory that he alone deserves.

Secondly, we need to communicate what sin is not so we can understand the misconceptions of sin.

2. THE MISCONCEPTIONS OF SIN.

a) The confusion between sin and sin's effects. (3:16-19)

Be careful not to confuse the effects of sin with sin itself. What we must understand is that we are in a predicament of our own making and that the effects of sin are not the root of the problem. Sin is the foundational problem that causes the misery that follows. Notice that Adam and Eve sinned at the beginning of chapter 3 and the many consequences that followed this sin. **We see the effects of sin and brokenness at play right away.**

Look with me at Genesis 3:16-19 which says, *"16 To the woman he said, I will **surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain, you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.**" 17 And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; **18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.**"*

Greg Gilbert says, "It's become fashionable lately to present the gospel by saying that Jesus came to save humanity from guilt or meaninglessness or purposelessness or emptiness. Now of course those things really are problems, and many people feel them deeply. But the Bible teaches that humanity's fundamental problem—the thing from

which we need to be saved—is not meaninglessness or disintegration in our lives, or even a debilitating sense of guilt. **Those are merely symptoms of a deeper and much more profound problem: our sin.**”

We often want to treat the effects of sin rather than sin itself. We try to explain away the effects of sin or erase the things we don't like without dealing with our sin. Humanism tries to dismiss sin by dismissing God. However, humanism can't explain why evil things happen to good people. John Shook (the director of education at the University of Buffalo) says, "Such humanists take 'sin' to be just a scary religious delusion, and regard 'evil' as a similarly imaginary monster." It's a delusion until you are face to face with sin's ugly effects and can't diagnose the problem. We don't have to work too hard to prove that there is an underlying problem that is causing heart break in the world that we live. How does a humanist explain why they don't want an intruder in their house? Or why they are upset when someone steals their wallet or car. If it's not wrong... why get upset? How do they explain murder? What about the tragic killing that happened in Oak Bay over Christmas time. Why would a father kill his children? The deep underlining reason beneath it all is a problem with humanity. We need to tell people beneath all the pain and hurt in this world is a problem inside the heart of every man and woman. We call it the sinful nature.

History and experience tell us that humans are not improving. The Bible says that the human heart is deeply corrupt. We cannot do what is right on our own. Romans 7 and 8 describe human nature with wonderful accuracy. We are not capable of doing ultimate good because we have a sinful nature. The solution for human beings is not relying on the gradual improvement of human nature, but reliance on faith in the love of the God who created us and on the blood of God's Son. Indeed, I believe that for us to rely on humans to solve all human problems is downright dangerous. Without God, our cultures and societies will gradually go in an ever-worsening spiral toward greater evil. The vision of the secular humanist is a false one.

Brian McLaren explains the sinful nature this way, “How does a worm get inside an apple? Perhaps you think the worm burrows in from the outside. No, scientists have discovered that the worm comes from inside. But how does he get in there? Simple! An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom. Sometime later, the worm hatches in the heart

of the apple, then eats his way out. Sin, like the worm, begins in the heart and works out through a person's thoughts, words, and actions.

- “If life is a machine, then sin is a bad gear that makes the machine malfunction.
- If life is a kingdom, then sin is a terrorist movement in the kingdom.
- If life is a family, then sin is a feud between family members.
- If life is a body, then sin is an untreated disease that poisons the whole system.
- If life is a river, then sin is mercury or arsenic that pollutes it.
- If life is a garden, then sin is the army of slugs that eat your tomatoes.
- If life is a computer, then sin is a virus that destroys your hard drive.”

That’s how the Bible talks about the depth and darkness of our sin—it is in us and of us, not just on us. We need to understand that there is a difference between the effects of our sin and our sinful nature.

Next, we often live like we have the ability to defeat sin. Some may even believe we have the ability to overcome sin.

b) The confusion of our own ability to overcome sin.

Look with me at verse 23, “*therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground....*” Notice that Adam or Eve couldn’t talk their way out of their rebellion or had the ability to overcome their sin to restore what they had. Adam and Eve’s joyful relationship with God was still broken and they were kicked out of the garden. The problem of sin continues to this day.

Throughout biblical history, we have seen multiple attempts to fix the problem of evil. Humanity said we need a better leader or king and that will fix the problem. Or we just need better rules or a standard that we have to live up to. We need to better be educated. Or we just need to understand how our mind works and better learn the psychological process so we can solve the problem. And yet, history tells us that we continually fall short and we still see sin at play in our modern life. Our own human abilities cannot defeat sin.

Romans 7:14-16 says, “¹⁵ *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* ¹⁶ *Now if I do what I do not want, I agree*

with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.”

When we understand God’s law, like “do not covet,” our sinful nature inevitably rebels against that law, and we covet. This is the dilemma of humanity—it is simply how we are. The law magnifies our sin nature.

Humanity continually rebels against God and misses the standard that God has for us. We do not live a perfect life. We may be respectable, but we are imperfect.

- No husband or wife is free from selfishness and disturbance all the time—not perfectly.
- No father or mother treats his child like they should all the time—not perfectly.
- No child obeys his or her parent all the time—not perfectly.
- No workman is diligent in his labor every minute of every day—not perfectly.
- No neighbor is as good and kind and helpful as he should be all the time—not perfectly.
- No person disciplines his body in eating, exercising, and sleeping all the time—not perfectly.
- No person controls his mind from impure and selfish thoughts all the time—not perfectly.

John Bunyan illustrates this truth in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. “In the Interpreter’s House, (the character) Christian sees a very dusty room that had never been swept. First, a man with a broom tries to clean the floor, but the broom’s only effect is to raise choking clouds of dust. The more he sweeps, the more the dust is stirred up; this is a picture of the law, Bunyan says, which cannot clean a sinful heart but only stirs up the sin. However, Christian watches as the broom is set aside and a young girl sprinkles the whole room with water. After that, the room is quickly cleaned; this is a picture of the gospel of grace and its ability to purify the heart. The grace of God can do what the law could never do: cleanse us from sin.” Another way of putting it – sin is like that unwanted beard or body hair that keeps growing back.

We are all short of perfection and will never be able to overcome sin on our own. We can try harder but at some point, we will slip up. We can improve our life and make ourselves comfortable with things developed through technology and science. **But material things do not satisfy nor fulfill the human soul, not completely, not perfectly. Material things cannot erase greed, selfishness, drunkenness, murder,**

prejudice, pride, bitterness, loneliness, lust, hoarding, hatred, emptiness, immorality, drugs, war, and purposelessness.

We need to understand that material things of this world cannot erase the host of evil that rises up and enslaves the human heart. Material things just cannot significantly improve the human condition, not the real issues of human life. What, then, can? Christ and His love. When man is willing to trust Christ and to live like Christ says to live, that is, to love, then human life and relationships among people will improve significantly.

Phillips Brooks says, "The solution to sin is not to impose an ever-stricter code of behavior. It is to know God."

D.A. Carson says, "What is shocking to us is when God shows us the sin that runs to the very depths of our hearts, the deep-running deposits of filth and corruption that we never knew existed in us and that we ourselves could never expunge. **That's how the Bible talks about the depth and darkness of our sin—it is in us and of us, not just on us.**"

As we have seen, we do not have the ability to overcome sin on our own. Next, how should we respond to sin?

3. THE RESPONSE TO SIN.

a) Responding to the severity of our sin.

When we are communicating the gospel, we need to help others understand the severity of our sin.

Illustration: The neighbor's cat died drinking antifreeze because it was a poison disguised as sweet substance.

Look with me at Romans 6:23 "*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Sin deserves death for two very clear reasons which tie back to how we started.

i) Sin is rebellion against God. It is rejecting God, ignoring God, disobeying God, denying God, and refusing to live for God.

True justice demands that sin receive its payment or its wages. Since sin is so opposed to God's nature and is actually rebellion against God, it deserves to die.

- to be cast far, far away from God
- to have no part of God
- to be banished from God's sight
- to be separated from God's presence forever

- to be condemned and punished for having dishonored and cursed God.

ii) Sin is a betrayal of God.

Sin strikes out against God, attempts to tear down God's nature and exalt ourselves...

- of purity and morality
- of holiness and glory
- of justice and righteousness
- of love and grace

As a worker receives his wages, so sin shall receive its wages. Sin must receive its just wages. Sin must die; it cannot exist in the presence of God.

The severity of sin is not a pleasant thing to talk about. It doesn't have the warm fuzzies of God's love and forgiveness which we will talk about next week. However, failing to note the severity of God is stealing away all the credit he's due.

Matt Chandler points out, "To discount, disguise, or disbelieve what God does in response to the falling short of his glory is, in itself, falling short of his glory. So, let's note God's severity.... Yet misunderstanding this reality is historically how the doctrine of hell has been abused and misused by so many men in the name of God. **You cannot scare anyone into heaven. Heaven is not a place for those who are afraid of hell; it's a place for those who love God.** You can scare people into coming to your church, you can scare people into trying to be good, you can scare people into giving money, you can even scare them into walking down an aisle and praying a certain prayer, but you cannot scare people into loving God. You just can't do it. **You can scare them into moral acts of goodness. But that's not salvation.** It's not even Christian. If someone is heading over a cliff, for instance, it makes little sense to hand him a pictorial display of what will happen when he goes over and crashes onto the rocks below.

What I mean is that we can receive this information about God's severity, we can note it, as Paul tells us to do, and we can explore the biblical array of God's wrath, eternal conscious torment of hell, and how we all deserve both of them, but this information is not sufficient for us to praise God. Have you ever watched Court TV and seen the judge slam down the gavel and say, "I sentence you to die by lethal injection,"

and heard the convicted party go, "Yeah! I love you, Judge!" No, you haven't. We don't see that, because no one who's guilty wants justice; he wants mercy."

Christians believe that because of this we are eternally separated from God because a perfect God cannot tolerate sin and we deserve death. When we recognize our sin for what it is, it's a turning point back to God.

However, Martin Luther says, "The recognition of sin is the beginning of salvation." We need to understand the seriousness of our sin before we can respond to His gift of life. Next let's look at His gift of life.

b) Responding to His gift of life.

We also believe that God in His mercy and grace sent his Son, Jesus, to die on our behalf so that His sacrifice will serve as payment for our sins. We believe that in dying, Christ took on our sins and bore them on His person and on His resurrection and conquered death and by it the death we so richly deserved. **The Bible tells us that only if we accept this gift of forgiveness by acknowledging God and His son, confessing our sins, and repenting of them, we are saved by His grace. The gift of God is eternal life.** Note that eternal life *is not* the payment of wages. A man cannot work for and earn eternal life. It is the gift of God, and it is only through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the reason the Bible begins with God Himself, begins with God creating the heavens and the earth. Man must know God, know Him personally. God alone has created man and the universe. Therefore, God alone can meet man's condition ...

- God alone can deliver man from death.
- God alone can deliver man from the terrible and devastating evils of the world.
- God alone can permanently improve man's life and world.

Conclusion:

In summary, we need to understand and talk about:

1. THE DEFINITION OF SIN.

2. THE MISCONCEPTIONS OF SIN.

3. THE RESPONSE TO SIN.

The gospel of is full of stumbling blocks and sin is one of the largest. To tell someone who thinks of themselves as basically good and self-sufficient, that they are at the core sinful and rebellious is difficult. Some may say insulting.

The good news is that God won't let us rebel forever. God doesn't expect perfection, he expects repentance. God cares enough about humanity to take our rebellion seriously. He calls us to account for our actions, because it matters to him that we treat him, and others. In other words, he won't let the rebellion go on forever.

1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"

This morning, if God has spoken to you about any sin in your life, I or one of pastor or prayer partners would be glad to talk to you or to pray with you. Please come to the front to see us.

Thomas Watson puts it this way, "**Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet.**"