

What Is The Truth About Sin?

Genesis 3:1-12

Genesis 5:18-24

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In my childhood I was told repeatedly I needed to be a good boy because Santa was coming. The premise was that Santa would or wouldn't come based on my behavior – if I was bad, no Santa, but if I was good? WOW! In other words I could earn Christmas. But we know that's not true, because grace doesn't work that way –we can't earn grace. Grace is something God gives us, showers upon us, because God loves us. Christmas is grace—the first one from God, the rest from us responding to that first gift of grace. Unfortunately, we have twisted and persist in believing it all turns on behavior, that we're not supposed to do wrong, that someone is keeping a list of our good deeds and our bad ones. Where did this crazy and wrong idea come from? I have looked for it in the Bible—it's not there. But there are what appear to be standards of behavior in the Bible – the Ten Commandments for instance, but they came so late in time compared to Adam and Eve. They are barely 3000 years old, and they weren't the standard for Adam or Noah or even Abraham. I'm going to shock you with the next line: I don't think they were intended as standards for sin. I see them as God's revelation of who God is and how God functions and cares, given to us for a purpose.

And, I am going to preach them in a few weeks as the Manual of Instructions for the job Israel was given at Mt. Sinai –the job of being God's Holy Nation and Royal Priesthood—the job of taking God to the world and bringing the world to God. They became the standards for us, of how those of us who are committed to God ought to try and live to project God living within us, but they do not connect in any way with the gift of grace or this early story of the first folks described in the Bible, Adam and Eve.

They didn't have a list of do's and don'ts. So what were they judged by? What was the standard that applied to them? It was short and it was simple!. Today, we will hear it in two vignettes from the Bible describing events that occurred in the dawn of our history. As we read God's word, ask, what s the standard they were held to? What defined sin for them, sin from the beginning, and sin rightfully continuing today?

Our first reading comes from Genesis 3:1-12; it's a story about Adam and Eve. Listen for God's word:

Genesis 3

- 1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He (the serpent) said to the woman, "Did God really say, "you must not eat from any tree in the garden?"
- 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat from the trees in the garden,
- 3 but God did say, "you must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden and you must not touch it or you will die."
- 4 "You will not certainly die, the serpent said to the woman!
- 5 For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing Good and Evil,"
- 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it.
- 7 Then, the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and they made coverings for themselves.
- 8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.
- 9 But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"
- 10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."

- 11 And He said, "Who told you that you were naked?" Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?"
- 12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit, and I ate it."

Before we think about the concept of sin set forth in the passage, let's get a couple things off the table:

First—this story is not here to disparage women. Both ate the fruit; both knew what they were doing. There is no differentiation between them in what they did wrong.

Second—today we will not focus on shifting the blame —It is part of the story. We heard the man says God, it's your fault, you put her here, and the man said, it's her fault, not mine —it was her idea. It was both of their faults.

So, where are we? It is clear they both sinned. But, what was the sin? And if we can answer that, then we begin to see what sin really is. The first couple had only one rule, not a long list of proper and improper behaviors. God wasn't keeping score, God didn't tell them you got an 85 yesterday pulling down that fine 98 you got the day before. Those things we point to as the rules and the standards came much later, at Mt Sinai, after Israel was rescued from Egyptian slavery. Those rules and requirements they were intended to be used for something else. They didn't apply to Cain and Abel or Noah or Abraham or Moses until he was 84. Somehow we have read them and corrupted the gift of Sinai and imposed them on God's beginnings in Genesis. From them we have created a "man-made" list of rights and wrongs, do's and don'ts, sin and righteousness." Some have even classified this gift into a list of moral rights and wrongs —sins, calling some venial sins —not so bad —little sins, and some-mortal sins —punishable by death. And all of that just misses the mark!

So, sin has to be something else, not keeping score, but something else. This passage we just read tells us. Remember, God told Adam and Eve they were free, completely free, they could do anything creation offered, except for one thing. God said you may not eat of one tree in the middle of the garden. Everything else—OK. But, that tree—DO NOT EAT FROM IT! It was a Commandment! Now you know, God could have kept that tree out of the Garden, kept it in heaven, put it somewhere else. But God didn't create us as robots and there had to be some test, some line to differentiate between God and the creature. God drew the line at one tree. Stay away from it!. At the same time. God created us like God, in God's image. That means we can think; we can make decisions, and we can choose whether we will obey God or not. That one tree was the test. They couldn't choose the tree or touch it or eat from it.

But one day, they touched it and they ate from it. They disobeyed God! Instead of being open with God and walking with God, they hid; they didn't want God to know. But God knew. God always knows. And there is the definition of sin..... disobeying God, rebelling against God, not walking with God, hiding from God, letting another take us away from God and God's word. The truth about sin is that it is tied to our relationship with God, to listen to God and to obey in the things God asks of us.

One professor in Seminary defined sin as anything that separates us from God. Disobeying, hiding from God, trying to become the equal of God instead of remembering we are just the creature, listening to the voice of the enticer, who is always willing to lead us away from God, this is sin, all of this is sin.

Another important concept that comes from this story is what is called the "Doctrine of Original sin." Under this doctrine it is said sin was introduced into God's very good creation by the human and that this sin caused the separation between God and mankind, a separation which has lasted to this day, and a separation that has infected all of us to be predisposed to sin. It is true that this is the first sin and that mankind introduced it into God's creation, but it does not mean we are all doomed no matter what. God gave each of us the freedom to choose God or reject God. The decision is not pre-determined; if it were, why did Christ preach "Repentance," and why did Christ, and every other prophet before and preacher since call us to repent? We are not fixed as sinners

forever. We can change. We can recognize our loss, our separation, and turn to God. The story of the first sin teaches this –that we have a choice!,

I want to close with our second reading, which also comes from Genesis, this time Genesis 5:18-25
Genesis 5—it is a genealogy

- 18 When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch (Seven generations after Adam)
- 19 After he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters.
- 20 Altogether Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died.
- 21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methusaleh.
- 22 After he became the father of Methusaleh, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters.
- 23 Altogether Enoch lived a total of 365 years.
- 24 Enoch walked faithfully with God, then he was no more, because God took him away..

Enoch walked with God, no Enoch walked faithfully with God. Scripture says we should too. Anything less is what the essence of sin is. Not do's and don'ts. But walk with God, be in God's company, talk and listen to God.

Enoch walked with God. It is this failure to walk with God that is sin, because if we are not walking with God, we are separated from God. The prophet Micah was given this truth thousands of years later and he wrote it in Micah 6:8

What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God!

To do justice—God's justice of fairness to all and in all that we do. God's love of mercy—forgiveness and second chances for all, again and again. And finally, as Adam did, as Enoch did, as Abraham did –they walked humbly with God every day of their lives.

Failure to do this is sin.