

Intro:

Today I want to go back to our text from last week and emphasize one point in particular. It is something we covered as we worked our way through the passage, but it is something I want to make sure you will not overlook... I don't want you to pass it by.

I have entitled this message:

How Sin Begins

Our passage gives us a key to understanding ourselves and how we operate in ourselves, in our humanity, in our natural, sinful human state.

Let's read our passage once again and see if you can pick out the key factors that tell us how sin begins:

Read Rm 1.18-23

What are the factors?

- They glorified not
- Neither were thankful

There is a third, follow-up characteristic to these two:

- Thinking themselves to be wise [pride]

Not only will understanding these factors more fully help us understand ourselves and our own motivations but it will help us have more compassion on those around us who have no knowledge of God.

They are trapped in a spiritual prison of their own making. There is no human way out of their prison, but repentance and submission in faith to God in Christ.

While this is true of people without Christ, my primary application in this message is to us.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have new life in Christ, old things have passed away, all things have become new. But... you old man is not eradicated, you still struggle with your sin nature, you must learn to walk in the Spirit.

So this question is very pertinent to you and me as well: how does sin start? What launches the many varieties of sinful behaviour, not just by unbelievers, but by believers like you and me?

Our text gives us the answer, and from it we will work on this proposition:

Proposition: Sin begins with two fundamentally anti-God self-oriented motives of heart.

I. The initial factors of sin understood

A. Sin begins when a man refuses to glorify God

1. What does it mean 'to glorify'?

a. A definition from Charles Hodge (from last week)

“To ‘glorify’ is to ascribe honor to anyone, to praise, and also to honor, to make glorious, or to cause someone else to honor anyone.”¹

b. An example of glorification: Rm 11.33-36

c. Illustration of glorification

Our visit to 'God's Mountain' in Penticton, BC

- We would praise the location, the atmosphere, the hostess
- We would speak highly of Dr. Bob Jones III who arranged our visit – no cost to us – and from whom we received personal conversation, the blessing of his preaching, and owe a great deal for over thirty years of ministry to us
- We would honour the main speaker, Pasto Martin Blanton of Vacaville Bible Church in Vacaville, CA for his fine Bible messages that spoke right to the heart of our need as pastors and missionaries.

And most of all, we would honour the God of heaven whose grace made all this possible. God worked in the hearts of those who saw fit to invite us, who ministered to us during our trip, and who continues to shower us with blessings every day. God's grace even works through unsaved people like the proprietor of the place we stayed.

2. What does it mean 'to not glorify'?

a. To not glorify means to refuse such praise and honour, and, indeed to dishonour.

¹ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. 36.

- b. To not glorify means to especially dishonour someone for whom honour is due.
 - 1) God gives man life — and man says he emerged from the primordial slime
 - 2) God gives man the things that pertain to life — and man says he earns his own bread
 - 3) God gives men the ability to think, to reason, to provide for himself – and men will not honour him with their time in worship, with their tongue in praise, and most of all will not honour him with any of ‘their’ precious cash
- 3. Synonyms for the failure to glorify God
 - a. Presumption
 - b. Evil speaking
 - c. Derision
 - d. Profanity
 - e. Blasphemy
- B. Sin begins when a man replaces proper thanks to God with bitter begrudging of God’s unfair dealings
 - 1. The Bible reveals to us that God’s sovereign dealings in our lives are meant for our good and his glory
 - a. Rom 8.28
 - b. Testimony of Joseph concerning evil of his brothers (Gen 50.20)
 - c. Ps 46.1-2
 - d. 2 Cor 4.15-17
 - 2. The Bible calls men, especially believers, to thanksgiving for *all* things
 - a. Eph 5.20
 - b. Col 3.17
 - c. 1 Th 5.18

Just as H. A. Ironside was about to begin his meal in a crowded restaurant, a man approached and asked if he could join him. Ironside invited him to have a seat. Then, as was his custom, Ironside bowed his head in prayer.

When he opened his eyes, the other man asked, "Do you have a headache?" Ironside replied, "No, I don't."

The other man asked, "Well, is there something wrong with your food?" Ironside responded, "No, why?"

"Well," the man said, "I saw you sitting there with your head down and I thought you must be sick, or that there was something wrong with your food."

Ironside replied, "No, I was simply thanking God as I always do before I eat."

The man said, "Oh, you're one of those, are you? Well, I want you to know I never give thanks. I earn my money by the sweat of my brow and I don't have to give thanks to anybody when I eat. I just start right in!"

Ironside said, "Yes, you're just like my dog. That's what he does too!"²

3. The attitude of ingratitude towards God accuses God of dealing unfairly with us

Men blame God for most of the world's problems, not just dishonours God for God's gracious gifts.

- God gets the blame for wars
- God gets the blame for sickness and disease
- God gets the blame for natural disasters

'If there is a God, why did this happen?'

- C. Sin becomes entrenched when a man considers his independent approach to life to be wise

1. Pride is step 1-A, a half-step behind the other two
2. Men think their way, their solution to life's problems, is better than God's

² Recounted by Ray Stedman, *Folk Psalms of Faith*.

II. The initial factors of sin displayed

A. Contrast Adam's speeches (Gen 2.23, 3.12)

1. Speech one: glory, praise, honour
2. Speech two:
 - a. Blame the woman
 - b. Blame God
 - c. Contrast 'the woman whom thou gavest *to be* with me' with 2.23

Would you say Adam is glorifying God? Would you say he is thankful?

B. Cain (Gen 4.4, 6, 13)

1. Signs of glory to God?
2. Thanksgiving?

C. Achan (Josh 7.19-21)

1. Achan's sin brought reproach on Israel – how many enemies did it embolden? How many lives did it cost?
2. Achan's sin therefore brought reproach on God
3. Achan's covetousness is a display of unthankfulness: I don't have it, I deserve it, I'll take it.

D. David (2 Sa 11.2-3)

1. Was God in David's thoughts at all?
2. Was there gratitude to God for his provision? (David already had many wives – must he have one more?)

E. Ananias and Sapphira (5.1-6)

1. Wanted glory for self not God
2. No gratitude for the blessings of their salvation

We don't know the spiritual condition of all these people – some of them certainly were believers. Almost all of them, except perhaps Cain, professed faith in God.

Their sins are conceived in self-will and in gratitude.

And what about our sins?

III. The initial factors of sin applied

A. Situations that prompt sin

1. Dissatisfaction with a spouse
2. Resentment of parents
3. Difficulty on the job
4. Disappointments with friends, peers
5. Anger over inabilities
6. Anger over abuse

Larry Bird is a former pro basketball player who won many awards. He tells a story in his autobiography of something that happened to him as a high-school ball player.

He was chosen to play as a second team all-star for Indiana in a series of annual games between Kentucky and Indiana. He was unknown at the time.

- During practice, the second team outplayed the first team, but in the first game the first team started.
- Indiana was up by about 8 points in the second half when the second team was put in – and proceeded to demolish the Kentucky side.
- In the second game the same thing happened. The first team went in first but was trailing, so the second team was put in. Bird's team took off and got a lead before the half ended.
- In the second half, the first team started, then later the second team was put in ... except for Larry Bird.
- Bird just sat on the bench, wondering what was going on.

With about two minutes to go in the game, the coach came over to Larry and said, 'Hey, I forgot all about you. Why don't you go in now and get something?' Bird said, 'Too late, Coach. I've already been embarrassed.'

Years later, looking back, Bird had this comment:

- ‘I know I reacted wrong,’ Larry Bird says, ‘but I was young. However, if I had to do it all over again, I would probably do the same thing because I know how embarrassed I felt that night. My values have changed. My outlook has changed. But I can remember how I felt that night, just sitting there — totally forgotten.’³

Poor Larry Bird! Right?

- This is the same Larry Bird who fails to acknowledge or recognize or take responsibility for an illegitimate daughter.

Has Larry Bird really matured? What is on display?
Ingratitude. Resentment.

This is how people react to God because God gave them a raw deal.

B. How can we gain victory over these most basic matters of sin?

1. Work to build love for God in your life
2. Practice thanksgiving to God for everything (creative praying!)

Conclusion:

Why should you do this?

- Because the fruit of ingratitude and resentment is empty, futile reasoning (thinking that goes nowhere and solves nothing)...
- Because the fruit of ingratitude and resentment is a darkened heart that cannot see things right...
- Because the fruit of ingratitude and resentment and pride is foolishness...

May God keep us from being unthankful! May we turn to God and give Him glory!

³ Larry Bird, *Drive! The Story Of My Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1989).