

THE NATURE OF SIN

Leader pages on pp. 110-113

THE POINT:
WE ARE SINNERS, AND ON OUR OWN, WE CAN DO NOTHING ABOUT IT.

ISAIAH // 59:1-13

¹ Indeed, the Lord’s arm is not too weak to save, and his ear is not too deaf to hear. ² But your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen. ³ For your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers, with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, and your tongues mutter injustice. ⁴ No one makes claims justly; no one pleads honestly. They trust in empty and worthless words; they conceive trouble and give birth to iniquity. ⁵ They hatch viper’s eggs and weave spider’s webs. Whoever eats their eggs will die; crack one open, and a viper is hatched.

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⁶ Their webs cannot become clothing, and they cannot cover themselves with their works. Their works are sinful works, and violent acts are in their hands. ⁷ Their feet run after evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are sinful thoughts; ruin and wretchedness are in their paths. ⁸ They have not known the path of peace, and there is no justice in their ways. They have made their roads crooked; no one who walks on them will know peace.

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⁹ Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We hope for light, but there is darkness; for brightness, but we live in the night. ¹⁰ We grope along a wall like the blind; we grope like those without eyes. We stumble at noon as though it were twilight; we are like the dead among those who are healthy. ¹¹ We all growl like bears and moan like doves. We hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. ¹² **For our transgressions have multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us. For our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities:**

¹³ transgression and deception against the Lord, turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering lying words from the heart.

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Lord’s Arm (v. 1)– The Lord’s strength is more than adequate to bring deliverance to captive Israel.

Viper’s Eggs / Spider’s Web (v. 5)– The Israelites delighted in poisoning or ensnaring others with their evil habits.

HOW SHOULD WE FEEL ABOUT THE SIN IN OUR LIVES?

If you are a parent, you know every child toddler goes through the stage of saying the word “no” to most every instruction. This is a normal developmental stage. No one teaches kids to do this because it is something we all are born with. We all are born with the desire to say no to authority so we can do whatever we want.

By saying no, we are rejecting the authority of the person to whom we are responding. Kids can love their parents deeply, but in that moment, they are rejecting the authority of their parents. From birth, all of us are good at rejecting the authority of our parents. We are also adept at rejecting God’s authority, saying no to what He wants and doing instead what we want. It’s called sin, and we are born with a sin nature. Saying no to our parents often led to punishment, and the same is true when we say no to God. And no amount of good on our part will cancel out our punishment.

In this session, we will discover we are sinners, and on our own, we can do nothing about it. Thankfully, God did not leave us in this state.

Sin Separates Us from God // Isaiah 59:1-5

In 1990, President George H. W. Bush made a funny statement: “I do not like broccoli. And I haven’t liked it since I was a little kid and my mother made me eat it. And I’m president of the United States and I’m not going to eat any more broccoli!” Of course, President Bush was capable of eating broccoli. But as president, he chose to not have anything to do with it.

Some kids and adults dislike broccoli, but God has a far-greater reaction to sin. He absolutely detests it. He hates it so much that it repulses Him. Look at how Isaiah described our sinful nature in Isaiah 59:4-5: worthless, like viper’s eggs and a spider’s webs. Because a holy God will have nothing to do with sin, “your iniquities are separating you from your God” (v. 2). Our sin makes Him hide His face from us (v. 2).

WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST STRIKING IN THESE VERSES FROM ISAIAH 59? WHY?



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What exactly is sin? Consider the first sin ever committed. Adam and Eve deliberately disobeyed God's order not to eat from a certain tree (Gen. 3:6-7). As a result, they were kicked out of the garden of Eden and separated from God's presence. Previously, they had been able to walk and talk with God, but now they weren't allowed back into the garden. Humanity's relationship with God was damaged from that point on.

Let's not confuse sin with bad things we do. Sin is so much deeper than that. Sin is what we do when we place ourselves, our desires, and our agendas above God. It wasn't just a piece of fruit. The act of eating what God said not to eat was placing that small choice ahead of God, and anything we place ahead of God—no matter how “small” it seems—is rebellion.

WHAT EVIDENCE DO YOU SEE IN THIS WORLD THAT EVERYONE HAS SINNED?

Sin puts everyone on a level playing field. Since rebellion is rebellion—no matter how small—we are all seen as sinful people. No one can justify their sin by saying, “At least I'm not as bad as that person.” We each have sick hearts set on treasonous rebellion against our holy and perfect God.

It's not that God doesn't care or is incapable of helping us. As Isaiah said, “Indeed, the Lord's arm is not too weak to save, and his ear is not too deaf to hear” (v. 1), but our sin is the barrier. God desires to save us, “but your iniquities are separating you from your God” (v. 2).

Good Works Will Not Cover Sin //

Isaiah 59:6-8

Isaiah makes it very clear in this passage that we can't cover up our sinful works. On our own, we are completely unable to repair the damage sin causes. Our “works are sinful works” (v. 6) and our “thoughts are sinful thoughts” (v. 7). Even the good we attempt to do to cover our sin is marred with sin! We simply cannot make up for our sin. We can't just do more good things to outweigh the bad things and call the relationship good. As the prophet Isaiah said later, “All our righteous acts are like a polluted garment” (Isa. 64:6) or “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6, KJV).



DIGGING DEEPER THE SIN PROBLEM

In a 2016 study of how Americans viewed sin, LifeWay Research found the following:

- 10% of respondents don't believe sin exists.
- 8% believe they are not sinners.
- 5% acknowledge they are OK with being sinners.
- 34% are working to be less of a sinner.
- 28% look to Jesus Christ to help them with their sin problem.

It's sad enough that 23 percent won't even acknowledge they have a sin problem, but it's equally tragic that 34 percent think they can fix it on their own.³

Why is it necessary for churches to be aware of the trends identified in this research?



WHY ARE GOOD WORKS NOT THE ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM OF OUR SINFULNESS?

The picture Isaiah painted goes against how most people view themselves. Most people won't deny they have made mistakes and done things they shouldn't have, but they see themselves as basically good people (see "Digging Deeper" for current research regarding how Americans view sin). Isaiah is clear about who is responsible for our sin problem in verse 8. We have made our own roads crooked. We've laid the road we walk on, and unfortunately, we can't straighten it!

God's Intervention Brings Salvation // Isaiah 59:9-13

Isaiah was writing to a group of people who were dead spiritually and given completely over to their addiction to sin. He described them as people who "grope along a wall like the blind;" "stumble at noon as though it were twilight;" and "growl like bears and moan like doves" (vv. 10-11). Isaiah also told us why they were like this: their "transgressions have multiplied before you" (v. 12). Instead of improving themselves (as many people think they can do), their sins were only growing and multiplying. They couldn't hide

who they were. They were sinners, and their sins testified against them.

WHAT MAKES THE IMAGES IN THESE VERSES AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO DESCRIBE OUR LIVES WITHOUT CHRIST?

It's the same for us. The apostle Paul said it in a similar way, "... and you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world." (Eph. 2:1-2) We weren't incapacitated or knocked down; we were dead. What hope do dead people have?

Neither Isaiah nor Paul paint a pretty picture of humanity and the world around us—and neither did Jeremiah: "The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable" (Jer. 17:9). We are terminally ill with sin, sick without any hope of getting better on our own. There's not a thing we can do to revive our dead, stony hearts.

Before coming to faith in Christ, we are all in the same boat: spiritually dead, enslaved to sin, and in possession of a debt far greater than we could pay on our own. We stand no chance of paying it back.

But that is not the end of the story! A few verses later, Isaiah said that God saw the people's

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plight and “His own arm brought salvation” (Isa. 59:16). Paul pointed to the same truth: “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!” (Eph. 2:4-5).

Feel the magnitude of what these passages tell us about God. On our own, we were blind people stumbling in sin and dead people with no hope for revival. But God decided that something had to change, and since none of us could do it ourselves, He would. It was God who took the first step toward us. It was God who provided a way for us to be free of the debt of our sin. It was God who made it so that our relationship with Him could be repaired.

HOW CAN OUR GROUP HELP ONE ANOTHER IN OUR STRUGGLE AGAINST SIN?

Without salvation from the sin that infests our hearts, we are completely without hope. But as we will see in the next session, God’s intervention breathed hope and life into our dismal condition.

DID YOU KNOW?

The sin condition of humanity reminds us of hymns like “Father, I Stretch My Hand to Thee,” written by Charles Wesley in the 1700s. We are powerless to redeem ourselves from sin, and hymns like this one remind us we must totally rely on the Lord. Have you ever heard of long-meter or old Dr. Watts hymns? Such hymns are sung in a long, drawn out manner and usually without musical accompaniment, and they were passed down orally in the black church. Though some of these hymns were not written by African-Americans, the manner in which they are sung is distinct to black churches. Congregations learned songs by following the lead of a song leader or preacher who could read or knew the words of the song. Each line would be sung with deep feeling and emotion, as is typically done in black churches today when singing songs like “Amazing Grace.”¹⁴

What role can the singing traditions in black churches play to convict us of sin and at the same time strengthen our resolve to overcome it?

LIVE IT

How should we respond to sin in our own lives and in the lives of others?

We will never attain a sinless life. With the help of the Holy Spirit and those around us, we can take bigger steps toward living in a way that honors God. We should begin by recognizing that God is the ultimate authority over us and over all of humanity. Then submit to His will and His way of helping us to overcome our sin. After all, He is strong enough to bare the sins of the whole world.

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- **Confession.** Admit you’re a sinner who has fallen short of God’s standard. Confess your sin to Him and ask for forgiveness. He is faithful and just to forgive you.
- **Prevention.** Evaluate where you are most prone to give in to temptation. Being tempted is not sin, but it can easily lead to sin. Draft some safeguards to help you avoid temptation in the first place.
- **Accountability.** Reach out to a believer you trust. Talk through areas in which you are weak, and ask them to hold you accountable and to walk with you so that you will not fall into sin.

DAILY READINGS

1. “I NEED THEE” // ROMANS 3:10,23

Session three emphasized the fact that we are sinners, and on our own, we have no hope of solving our sin problem. That is because “no one is righteous, not even one” (v.10). Verse 23 adds, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We cannot save ourselves because we all have been stained by sin. The hymn “I Need Thee” reminds us of our helplessness and His strength, our sinfulness and His righteousness.

Recall the words of this hymn throughout the day. Declare your need for the Lord, and thank Him for all He has done.

2. “STANDING IN THE NEED OF PRAYER” // ROMANS 6:23

A wage is a payment owed for something done. The first half of Romans 6:23 explains the depth of humanity’s sin problem and the resulting wages or consequences earned—death. Romans 5:12 calls it “death through sin” and that “death spread to all people because all sinned.” We all stand in need of God’s deliverance and salvation, and there is good news at the end of Romans 6:23: “The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” A wage is earned; a gift is unearned. A wage is payment deserved; a gift is graciously given. The depth of God’s love for humanity is overwhelming.

Thank God for the gift of eternal life through Christ.

3. “LOVE LIFTED ME,” PART 1 // ROMANS 5:6-8

We have been studying the horrendous nature of sin, but now it is time to celebrate God’s plan of salvation. First, let’s consider the timing of God’s loving deliverance of humanity from the shackles of sin. Romans 5:6 declares, “While we were still helpless, at the right time.” Romans 5:8 adds, “While we were still sinners.” Our Heavenly Father began initiating a plan of our salvation while we were sinners, not after we had fixed up our lives. He loves

us at our worst. In the first verse of the song “Love Lifted Me,” James Rowe wrote: “I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore, Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more, But (thank God for the but) the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry, From the waters [He] lifted me, now safe am I.”⁵

Never forget that when nothing else could help, we were lifted by God’s love.

4. “LOVE LIFTED ME,” PART 2 // ROMANS 5:6-8

In the previous reading, we celebrated the timing of God’s plan of salvation—when we were sinful and helpless. Now we will consider God’s solution—the way to be saved. Romans 5:6 says, “Christ died for the ungodly,” and Romans 5:8 specifies the people to whom the word “ungodly” refers—“us.” Verse 3 of “Love Lifted Me” reminds us we can’t save ourselves or work our way to God:

“Souls in danger look above, Jesus completely saves, He will lift you by His love, out of the angry waves; He’s the master of the sea, billows His will obey, He your Savior want to be, be saved today.”⁶

Praise the Lord! Our salvation is through faith in Christ alone.

5. RESPOND TO GOD’S LOVE // ROMANS 10:9-13

Indeed, our heavenly Father has provided a solution for humanity’s sin. God initiated a plan, sending His one and only Son to die on the cross for our sins. To receive this wonderful salvation, we must respond to God’s invitation. Romans 10:9 outlines what we must do to receive salvation: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Paul goes on to give us this assurance: “EVERYONE who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (v. 13).

Christ came to save everyone, and that’s good news! Receive Him and live for Him today.



The Importance of a Biblical Worldview

BY MARK CROSTON

The classic poem “Invictus,” written by William Ernest Henley in 1875, is quite compelling and many Christians embrace its metered lyrics without considering whether it challenges their biblical worldview. Here is its closing verse.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.⁷

The problem with the Invictus poem is that it is an expression of life without a biblical worldview. It doubts the existence of God in the first verse; declares that everything is chance in the second

verse; intimates there is no afterlife in the third verse; and declares that God has no impact on our lives in the last verse. Doubting God and declaring He has no impact on our lives is what people do every day, unfortunately many of them are Christians.

Recent studies suggest that only 6 to 10% of Americans actually have a biblical worldview. Among millennials that number goes down to only about 4%.⁸ These numbers have been declining over at least the past twenty-five years.

So, what is a biblical worldview?

A biblical worldview is simple. It includes the

beliefs that what the Bible says about the world should be believed as they are stated in the Bible. These beliefs include the following:

- The Bible is God's story and a message of redemption.
- God created the universe, the world and everything in them.
- Man sinned and spoiled God's perfect creation.
- God judged humanity's rebellion.
- We live in a broken and fallen world.
- God called Abraham to become the father of a nation He could use to teach us of our need for Him.
- Jesus, the Son of God, His death, and resurrection are God's only provision for man's salvation.
- The Church is on mission with God to save humanity.
- The full redemption of humankind happens at Jesus' second coming.

These may seem like very basic ideas for someone who is a Christian, and they are. They are the fundamental building blocks on which our faith is built.

Why does a biblical worldview make a difference?

A biblical worldview is powerful. Why do we do what we do? How are our preferences determined? Our BWV forms, informs, shapes, and provides a roadmap for life.

Our biblical worldview clarifies our values. It helps us to set personal priorities and determine what in life is important and what is not important. Everything is not of the same weight and importance. Some things don't matter, and some things mean everything. Some things we can let pass by like a breeze and others are worth, if necessary, dying for. Our biblical worldview clarifies our values and charts our course concerning everything else in our lives.

Our biblical worldview determines our behavior. When our values are clear they cause us to adjust our lives to them. To believe the way the Bible expresses belief is not just intellectual agreement. To believe the way the Bible expresses belief, our beliefs must impact our behavior. We must adjust our lives to line up with those things we say we believe. If we do not adjust our behavior, we do not truly believe what the Bible expresses when it tells us to believe.

Our biblical worldview shapes the culture. Culture is not something we do in isolation. Culture is the shared set of beliefs and values of a group of people. As we live with others, we will then either shape the culture or be shaped by the culture; we will be thermostats or thermometers; we will be the influencers or the influenced; the catalyst or the cannibalized. Culture is dynamic, ever changing, not static. So, if our biblical worldview has clarified our values and determined our behavior, then we are by our presence and actions shaping the culture around us.

Our biblical worldview requires routine adjustments. When driving a car, no matter how good a driver you are, you have to keep making minor and sometimes major adjustments at the steering wheel. Why, because our cars will drift; the road to our destination will bend; and at times, hazards will be in the way. As much as we would like to just hold the wheel still, we cannot if we will make it to our goal. In the same way, as we are shaping the culture, the resistance may cause us to drift; bends will be in the road; and hazards in our way. We must routinely reflect on our biblical worldview. This causes us once again to clarify our values, and the cycle is renewed.

If we do this consistently, "Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ" (Eph. 4:14-15).

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