

“SEVEN SERIOUS SINS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Hebrews 3:12-15

Introduction, do we have to talk about sin?

Last week on Cadet’s Sunday we talked about getting into the game and running the race and fighting the good fight of faith. We talked about setting joy before us as the goal and following Jesus and the great cloud of saints to that reward.

We talked about how the race is made harder by obstacles in our way, and weights and baggage that we carry and sin that clings so tightly to us.

I announced then that we are going to spend the next couple of months doing this very thing, putting off weights, shedding a few pounds, to help us run the race better, with greater hope for greater joy. We are going to look at seven serious weights or obstacles, seven serious sins.

What I really want to talk to you about is the joy that is set before us. I want to talk about the pleasure that is ours in God through Christ, kept in heaven for us. I want to talk about the grace that is ours because of the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins.

But we can’t know the joy until we know the sin that clings so tightly to us and we throw off its weight.

I take up this topic of the seven serious sins to fight for and advocate for our joy. Our best pleasure and our greatest joy will only be found in Christ and in the paths of righteousness and holiness.

As our text says, so as your brother, I am calling us to examine our hearts to see if there is any secret or hidden or overlooked sin in us and to turn to the living God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Until we really grasp our sinfulness, we cannot grasp how great is God’s love and grace and forgiveness and salvation. Everything we hold dear in our Christian faith depends on our understanding our sinful hearts.

Do I have a clue what it is in me that required the death of God? Do I have any real sense of what it is in my heart that caused God to kill His only Son on a cross?

A bloody Savior says something really serious is going on. If that's the remedy, what must the problem be? If that's the medicine what on earth is the disease?

Do I know I am so deeply broken and lost that nothing but the cross of Jesus can save me? Do I know I bring nothing to the cross, that I contribute nothing to my salvation, that I have nothing good in me to get God to accept and love and forgive me?

Do I have any idea of the danger I was in of hell and how much I have been saved from, and do I now have the kind of love for God that corresponds to that? Do I really get that God saved my life and do I feel toward Him what a person should feel who has had their life saved?

If I don't preach the true gospel, if I don't preach the seriousness of sin, *we will not long for and love God's grace and forgiveness*, and we will not see the beauty of Christ and His cross.

So I come not to condemn or to judge, but to convict us and hold out the hope of God's grace and forgiveness. It is for gospel joy that I preach. If I can help you defeat what stands between you and that joy, then I will give glory to God for using me in the most helpful way possible.

What is sin?

Sin is rebellion against a holy, righteous, good God.

Sin hates the truth and loves lies and darkness.

Sin hates to glorify God and praise God and make much of God.

Sin hates the real God and loves substitutes to God, idols, things, stuff, self.

Sin is wanting, preferring, desiring, loving anything more than God.

Sin is the rebellious "declaration that something other than God is more desirable than God" (Killjoys, p. 5).

Sin is universal.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Nobody has to tell us how to sin. Sin has so totally taken control of us we naturally sin from the moment of birth. We all have done it, we are all doing it and

we all will continue to do it. It's our DNA. The person next to me on the highway, at the grocery, on the airplane, in the pew is the same as me.

The question is not am I rebelling against God and His Word, but how am I rebelling against God and His Word? Can I be honest about that, and am I willing to examine my own heart in deeper ways?

Sin is deceitful.

Our text warns of the deceitfulness of sin, it's the master of disguises, it lies, it does bait and switch, it says one thing and does another, it never keeps its promises. Sin is a playground bully, it's manipulative, it takes advantage of you, exploits your weaknesses and your weak moments.

Sin is a Nigerian e-mail scam promising millions of dollars for just a little something from you.

Sin is pretty poison. Sin is fire, it starts out feeling warm and then it burns you.

Sin acts like your friend, but it's always your enemy. You can never trust sin, it will always betray you.

Sin is deadly.

Sin is the cause of all human pain and suffering, the cause of all that is evil and wicked and ugly in our world. All of creation groans because of sin. Sin is the cause of all physical and spiritual death. Sin has killed billions and billions of people. It kills 55 million people every year, 150,000 people every day.

Sin killed your best friend, Jesus. Sin hates your Father, God. Sin is out to destroy everything that's important to you and to destroy and kill you. You don't make friends with enemies, especially enemies that are out to kill you. The only thing to be done with this enemy is to hate it and kill it.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death.

Of course the death being talked about here is spiritual death, which is the worst kind of death. Don't be afraid of what can kill your body, be afraid of what can kill your soul and send it to hell (Matthew 10:28).

Sin is terminal cancer, it never just stays small, and it always grows until it kills the host. Nothing short of radical surgery will get rid of it.

All sin is deadly even the smallest. That's why I choose not to call this series the seven deadly sins, to avoid the implication there are other sins aren't deadly.

The deadly nature of sin is evident in our passage. Our brother here is warning us to fight against all sin lest we become hardened in our hearts by the deceitfulness of sin and show that our hearts really are unbelieving and that we really had no share in Christ at all, even though we thought we did because we hang out with Christians and go to church and say the right things.

This is a warning not to ignore warnings or take holiness lightly or presume on God's grace.

Sin is bondage.

Sin is *Egypt*. If you are reading through the OT you have read about Israel in Egypt and how God raised up Moses to lead the people out of Egypt and out of their bondage to slavery there.

You have read about how once in the wilderness the people complained and grumbled and murmured against Moses when they were afraid or hungry or thirsty. They said they would rather go back to Egypt than to keep going toward the Promised Land.

That's the power of sin, making us desire the bondage of our flesh rather than the freedom and joy of God's provision and presence. Sin will harden our hearts if we don't kill it.

How many sins are there?

Someone once said sin has a thousand faces (Plantinga). And a thousand names. There are at least a dozen Scripture passages that give some lists, but none of them are close to complete.

The Ten Commandments are said to contain and cover all the sins, and that's true. Proverbs 6 list seven things the Lord hates. Romans 1 gives a list and adds it's not just sinful to do these things, it's sinful to approve of others doing them.

Galatians 5, right before the fruit of the Spirit, gives the biggest single list, fifteen sins or works of the flesh. The list ends with the words, "and the like" meaning the list could go on and on.

Another famous list that has been around for a very long time is called the seven deadly sins or the seven capital sins.

History of the seven deadly or serious sins.

A lot of people think they are a Catholic thing and it is true the Catholic Church does recognize and use them. But the list actually dates back to the fourth century AD.

A fourth century monk, Evagrius of Pontus (346-399 AD), identified eight sins from which all the others flow. His list included sadness. Then in the sixth century Pope Gregory the Great made the list seven and said pride was the root and trunk, and the rest are the branches.

This list became the standard tool for self-examination and confession for hundreds of years for serious Christians wanting to pursue honest repentance and Gospel living. These seven sins encompass most of the others and these seven are common to us all.

I Corinthians 10:12-13 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.*

Implications and Application.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Do you hear what the Psalmist is asking? This is a prayer request. He is asking God to open up his heart and do heart surgery. This is a plea for the Holy Spirit to reveal our sin and help us to confess and repent, to turn away from evil and toward God.

We will use these seven serious sins to open up our hearts to see what's in them and to bring light into our own darkness; to expose whatever besetting sin has us in bondage and is keeping us from joy and freedom in Christ, from running the race.

How we respond to this series will depend on the nature of our relationship with God and the depth of our own understanding of our own hearts.

It will depend on where we are looking for our righteousness. If we are looking to ourselves then we will be guarded and deny any serious sins in our souls. If we are

looking for our righteousness in Christ, then we can easily look at the unrighteousness within us.

I am expecting to find out about sins I didn't know I had. I am expecting the Holy Spirit to open my blind eyes to new depths of darkness in my soul. And I am OK with that. Why would I want to harbor secret sin or unknown sin when the grace of forgiveness is offered if I will confess?

And I am expecting deeper victory and joy and spiritual fruit. Taking on a series like this is daunting and it may sound discouraging or painful. I want to give you some encouragement to take this Lenten journey, *three reasons*, all which aim at our true joy.

First, knowing our sin humbles us and breaks our pride. We see our folly, we see our weakness in the face of even the smallest temptations. We see there is no good in us. God will not have us proud and we must not despise God's humbling, because He lifts us the humble.

Second, knowing our sin causes us to turn to God and acknowledge our weakness and foolishness. When we cry out to God we show our dependence on Him and that pleases Him.

God wants us to hate our sin and so He lets us experience it and see how unfruitful it is and how empty and how devoid of lasting pleasure.

We can respond like Pharaoh before Moses and harden our hearts. It is a terrifying thought to be in a place spiritually like Pharaoh where we care nothing about our souls and our sin and about Christ and the cross. To have an evil and unbelieving heart leading him away from God.

Or we can respond like the Prodigal Son in the pigsty who woke up to the deceitfulness of sin and soften his heart toward God.

Remember the story. A profligate son demands his inheritance from his good father, squanders it all on wild, loose living while pursuing reckless gratification, is reduced to eating pig food before crawling home to beg his father's forgiveness.

Remember the scene when sin and forgiveness hug, when guilt and grace embrace. Without the son's rebellion and rejection of his father, he would never have that picture of the father's lavish mercy and generous grace.

That story is the story of my life. That story is the story of every Christian's life. If that is not your story yet, you need to make it your story. You need to be able to sing "I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

We can't know the power and depth and beauty of that story without spending some time in the pigsty.

Third, knowing the depth of our sin glorifies Jesus, we see the power of the cross and the importance of what His blood does for us. We see sin defeated, we see Satan defeated. We see how great a Savior and Redeemer we have.

Easter can't be Easter without Good Friday. The resurrection is not glorious without the cross.

Sin and grace are two sides of the same coin. We can't really talk about grace without talking about sin. The Gospel is not good news until we know the how bad the bad news is.

The good news is there is a cure and the cure is not greater will power or better resolve or behavior modification. We can't white-knuckle our way over our sin. The cure is not in us, to somehow be better, do better and try harder.

There are seven serious sins and there is one hope and help in the name of our Lord who defeated the power of sin on the cross and saves us by grace through faith in Him.

We must rely on the medicine already made available to us, the blood of Jesus, the power of the Spirit, the truth of the Word of God, the support of a community of believers, a great crowd of witnesses.

We are not left alone in this fight. God is for us. The whole OT and NT is a picture of God's gracious provision of salvation and atonement through the shedding of blood.

Pray with me and for me and for all of us as we set out on this Lenten Journey into the depths of our sinful hearts and into the depths of God's generous grace and incomprehensible joy.

We are kept by the power of God (I Peter 1:5), He will bring to completion the good work He has begun (Philippians 1:6), He who called us is faithful and He will bring about our sanctification (I Thessalonians 5:24).