

## “Let’s Be Honest: We Sin”

July 19, 2015

*Sinning like a Christian: The Good News series*

It was a while ago that I first saw the book, and I was immediately intrigued - “Sinning Like a Christian.” I haven’t ever done a whole lot of study on the Seven Deadly Sins as they’re called. They come out of the early church - first addressed by early Christians in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. We call them the “desert Fathers” because they lived in monastic communities where there was a lot of time to be by themselves. And even there, they couldn’t escape sin and temptation.

Maybe you’ve seen this Morning Prayer:

*Dear Lord,*

*So far I've done all right.*

*I haven't gossiped,*

*haven't lost my temper,*

*haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent.*

*I'm really glad about that.*

*But in a few minutes, God,*

*I'm going to get out of bed.*

*And from then on,*

*I'm going to need a lot more help.*

To be honest, talking about sin isn’t my favorite thing. I’m not here to lay down judgment or figure out the specifics on sin. The goal of this series isn’t to make myself or you feel more badly about our lives. One goal, though, is that we might be more willing to talk about our own sin. It’s personal. You’ll notice that we prayed a confession today. Coming together as a community and laying it out is a powerful way that we acknowledge who we are and who God is. We are sinners who need God’s grace.

We do a really good job at looking at other people. We can point out bad behavior in others quite well. We can judge and assume that we know how God feels about others. Frankly, we’d rather look out the window than in the mirror. And we can get so caught up on certain sins that we avoid looking at ourselves altogether. We grade sin. We make excuses all the time for small things, but those small things aren’t any smaller to God.

Paul’s claim to the church in Rome is relevant and important for us. “All have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.” We are on equal ground, and that’s tough,

right? I come to church because I want to get it right. I'm connected here because it's what I'm supposed to do. Friends, that might be true, but my prayer for all of us is that we're here because we know we need to be connected so that we have a place where we come together and acknowledge our need of a Savior in Jesus Christ.

I know we struggle. If I call out the seven deadly sins - pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony, lust - how many of you have ever struggled with at least one? Two? Three? Anyone want to go for all seven? These seven are not so much direct behaviors as they are attitudes or underlying causes of our sin.

The thing is - we have to acknowledge who we are before God. We are, each of us, this interesting mixture of saint - seeking to be more holy - and sinner - struggling with what separates us from God. The video asked the important question: if we can't possibly rid ourselves of sin, why do we try? What's the point of being more humble or more generous?

One thing I think I understand is that acknowledging who we are before - both the very good and the not so great - allows us to point to the One who alone can save, make new, reconcile - our God in Jesus Christ. And if our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, we must point to him as the One who redeems.

God is in the business of seeking and saving the lost by way of the One who came to be **with us** in the mess and in the beauty of who we are and what we struggle with. Friends, God knows it all and loves us still. We can't earn God's love. We don't deserve it. It's not our reward for something we do; it's all about what God does. We are saved by God's grace through faith. And love is our response to God's surprising gift of salvation.

I'm convinced that we really can't be humble on our own power. We can't be generous by our own strength. Whether we claim faith in God or not, I'm sure that we see virtues like forgiveness, kindness, diligence, and patience because God's grace is at work. That's good news!

At the same time, though, if we're seeking to be closer followers of Jesus, how can we claim the grace that God gives if we don't truly stand before God and each other and admit our need for it? Proverbs is full of "words to the wise." In chapter 28, it says, "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Blessed is the one who always trembles before God, but whoever hardens their heart falls into trouble."

What's the healthy tension between wallowing in our sin and knowing that we're going to struggle AND accepting that freedom and power God offers us to overcome temptation, to truly find forgiveness of sin, and to stand free in God's grace?

You and I have witnessed high profile people come clean about their indiscretions. Maybe you've been in a conversation where someone confessed sin to you. It's easy for us to stand back and take an inventory. Well, at least I'm not THAT bad. At least I haven't gone THAT far. But I'll be honest: as I've spent more time looking at these seven, I'm clear that they are very much a part of my life, probably your life, and our world.

One night while I was watching TV on vacation, a commercial came on. It's only 40 seconds long, so pay attention. **\*\*SHOW AD\*\***

Did you hear what it said? *Provokes lust...Illicits pride...Incites envy...Unleashes wrath...Temptation comes in many heart-pounding forms...*

Wouldn't you know? In the middle of the UP on a summer night, a car commercial that names sin clearly and recognizes temptation! Now I have never really desired a Lexus, but I paid attention to that ad! Lust, pride, envy, wrath (or anger) - this was an invitation to engage!

The "deadly" part of the seven deadly sins has to do with how they separate us - not only from God, but also from each other. They are chronic and difficult to shake, says Will Willimon. We're created for life-giving and life-honoring relationships. When we yield to pride, envy, anger, and all the rest, those relationships break down. Our need for God diminishes. Our understanding of who we are as God's beloved fades, and then our ability to look at each other as beloved fades, too.

Willimon says, "For those of us trying to take Jesus seriously, sin is not a slipup; it is offense against and rebellion against our Creator...that which separates us from a holy and righteous God."

But, thanks be to God, this doesn't end with us. That would be hopeless, but we don't live without hope. John Newton, a slave ship captain who later stepped away from the slave trade and spoke out against it and wrote the words of "Amazing Grace" who said, "Although my memory's fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior." God is rich in mercy and extends grace to us. We receive it and live in it. We respond to it with our faithfulness, love, extending grace to others.

Willimon says, "Our life with God enables us to openly confess our sin and to begin again, to get up, to go on, to resume our journey with God."

So, let's be honest: we sin. When we look at ourselves in light of God's love in Jesus Christ, in his life and ministry, in the cross, then we see our need for grace. That's where it starts - not with sin, but with grace. God's grace is real and available, and Jesus Christ offers forgiveness for our sin. Grace is truly greater than our sin.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.