

Romans 6:1-4
Missing the Mark
WRCoB 5.21.23

Last week we talked about words
That were becoming obsolete.

Many Christian words are losing their place
In the English language.

One in particular is this word, “sin”.

Sarah and I were having an email conversation about this.

As she was typing in the word “sin”
Her auto-correct changed it to “sun”
Making our point perfectly clear.

But this three-letter word with all its baggage
Still addresses the moral ills in society today.

We no longer speak of sin as the culprit
For the wrongs in society.

But the word is still quite apropos.

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Usually, when we talk about sin
It is in a personal context.

But sin is more than a personal immoral act.

There is another side to sin.

Today I want to speak to the differences
And suggest that sin is still a very relevant term
For the wrongs in our society today.

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Let's first define the word sin.

The Greek word for it is

Hamartia—to miss the mark

It was a term used in archery, missing the target.

It was Aristotle who stretch the definition
To include missing the mark
As an error of judgment.

Following, the word eventually evolved
Into what theologian Wayne Grudem defines as

*Any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude
or nature.*

According to the Bible
Sin was present in the world
Even before Adam and Eve came into being.

In Isaiah 14:12-15 Satan and his demons
Once part of the angelic host
Rebelled against God
And were cast out of heaven.

Sin was in the form of a serpent
When sin tempted poor Adam and Eve.

It was through Adam and Eve's disobedience
That caused sin to spread to all humankind.

Romans 3:23 NLT For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

Not only has sin permeated humanity
But after Adam and Eve's sin
God curses the ground
They were to care for.

In that sense, all of creation falls under the darkness of sin.

There is this duality to all things.
Best expressed with the words light and darkness.

Sin becomes more than just someone doing a bad thing

There is a corporate reality to sin.

If you read through the Bible
You see the phrase "not of this world"

Romans 12:2 CEV Don't be like the people of this "world", but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.

When the Bible speaks of the "world"
It's not talking about God's good creation.

It's talking about the corruption caused by sin on earth.

When the Bible speaks of the “world”
It is speaking to the evils in the world.

1 John 5:19 CEB

19 We know we are from God, and the whole “world” lies in the power of the evil one.

This is the duality found in life
Light and dark, good and evil.

Sin, in this way, is an evil force within God’s created order.

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Ann Lamott says

Sin is not the adult bookstore on the corner. It is the hard heart, the lack of generosity, and all the isms, racism and sexism and so forth.

Along with the “isms” in the world
This collective sin can also be called
Corporate evil, systemic evil, or simply injustice.

The Bible calls it sin
An entity also referred to as the devil or Satan.

A force in the world that is evil in nature.

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Going to our Scripture Lesson today

We see Paul writing to the people of Rome.

He has just finished writing about the boundless grace
Of Jesus Christ that covers our sins.

And then Paul asks a question.

Should we continue in sin
So that God's grace will abound even more.

Obviously, some thought
The more one lived in sin
The more grace one could experience.

Well, that's not the way it works!

The point Paul pushes here is this.

One cannot live in two realms.

And since our sin died in our conversion
We are no longer subject to its power.

Sin now is a force that tries to tempt us
Rather than a power controlling us.

We now walk in the newness of life.

When we become Christian
We walk out of one dimension and into the other.

Our allegiances have shifted to God through Jesus Christ.

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So, what does today's "world" look like?

The "world" as the Bible calls it
Is found in the injustices we see and experience.

We see it in groups of people
And we see it in institutions.

It can be described as the four “ism”.

- Classism
- Racism
- Sexism
- Naturism (destruction of God’s creation).

The institution of slavery was a systemic evil.
So was the Holocaust.

Martin Luther King, Jr. describes the “world” as the 3 evils

- Racism
- Poverty
- War

The Brethren believe all war is sin.

To participate in it was to willingly participate in a greater sin.

The Brethren originally did not participate in politics
Believing that institutions were part of this “world”.

And yet, many Christians reject the idea of systemic sin.

Many Christians only acknowledge an individual’s sin.

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Here’s an example of what I mean
When I say collective sin.

It comes from the book entitled
City of God, City of Sin
By Robert Linthicum.

Robert was a youth minister and worked for a summer
In a big city in a foreign country.

He met a young girl from the slums named Eva.

She was from a very poor family.

She became a Christian as a result of his ministry.

He put her in a Bible Study
She went back and finished school
She went on to community college.

He lost touch with her.

A year or two later he heard she became a prostitute.

He found her and started scolding her.

She explained to him
“Men came and told me I looked good.”

“They said they wanted to make me a prostitute.”

“And if I wouldn't, they would beat up my father and brother.”

Robert, the youth minister said
“Eva, this is terrible.
You should have trusted God and gone to the police.”

Eva responded, “It was the police who threatened me”

That’s when he realized that just converting her
Wasn’t going to change the system she lived within.

You can’t just try and convert everybody
You have got to engage in the injustice
That collective sin brings.

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Paul says in Ephesians 6

Ephesians 6:12 CEB We aren’t fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens.

What Paul describes is collective sin, systemic evil
Downright plain injustice.

The Catholics and the Black churches
Are aware of this collective sin or systemic evil.

The Catholics call it “social sin” or “structural sin”

In a sermon on social justice Pope John Paul II says,

“social sin” or “structural sin” proceeds from the accumulation of personal sins. It is, says the Pope, “a question of a moral evil, the fruit of many sins which lead to ‘structures of sin.’”

Since the source of “social sin” or “structural sin” is personal sin, the solution to it rests with our personal actions. We

must do more than change “the system,” as important as that may be. We must change ourselves.

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And so as Christians, saved by the grace of Jesus Christ
To walk in the fullness and newness of life
Involves two aspects of fighting sin.

First, the ongoing fight to transform our lives
Away from sin and “worldly” things
And more and more
Into the likeness of Jesus.

All of us who follow Jesus
Will continue to struggle with brokenness.

As Leonard Cohen sings

*Ring the Bell that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in.*

Practice the spiritual disciplines to help you fight the fight

Pray regularly, meditate, fast
Walk in the woods, be alone.

Study God’s word
Find a confidant
Join a community of faith.

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Secondly, we need to get involved in something
That fights the systemic evil, the corporate sins
The injustices in our society.

Whether it is fighting the sin of racism
Sex trafficking, poverty
Community building, or gun violence.

It is our responsibilities as followers of Jesus
To rid ourselves of the brokenness within ourselves
And for the brokenness outside of us.

Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days
When the devil came and tempted him.

Matthew 4:8-9 NIV

The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the “world” and their splendor. ⁹“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus responded by saying it was written
“Worship the Lord and serve only him.”

Later on, he reflected on the two dimensions in life
The “world” and God’s kingdom.

Matthew 16:26 NLT What do you benefit if you gain the whole “world” but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?

Chew on that for awhile.!