

# Sin and Repentance

## **Bible Reading - Deuteronomy 5 Verses 1 to 2, 6 to 22 (NLV)**

*'Moses called all the people of Israel together and said, "Listen carefully, Israel. Hear the decrees and regulations I am giving you today, so you may learn them and obey them!*

*<sup>2</sup> "The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Mount Sinai.*

*This is what he said:*

*<sup>6</sup> "I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery.*

*<sup>7</sup> "You must not have any other god but me.*

*<sup>8</sup> "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind, or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. <sup>9</sup> You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. <sup>10</sup> But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.*

*<sup>11</sup> "You must not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name.*

*<sup>12</sup> "Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. <sup>13</sup> You have six days each week for your ordinary work, <sup>14</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do. <sup>15</sup> Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the LORD your God brought you out with his strong*

***hand and powerful arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.***

***16 “Honour your father and mother, as the LORD your God commanded you. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.***

***17 “You must not murder.***

***18 “You must not commit adultery.***

***19 “You must not steal.***

***20 “You must not testify falsely against your neighbour.***

***21 “You must not covet your neighbour’s wife. You must not covet your neighbour’s house or land, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbour.***

***22 “The LORD spoke these words to all of you assembled there at the foot of the mountain. He spoke with a loud voice from the heart of the fire, surrounded by clouds and deep darkness. This was all he said at that time, and he wrote his words on two stone tablets and gave them to me.’***

## **SERMON**

In Matthew 12 we read this: ***‘Jesus’s disciples came and asked him, “Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?”***

***He replied, “You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them. That is why I use these parables, ‘For they look, but they don’t really see. They hear, but they don’t really listen or understand’. This fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah...’ (Matthew 12)***

Let us pray

Father God, Open up our eyes and our ears that we may see you clearly this afternoon and hear what it is you want to tell us, in Jesus Name we pray, Amen.

Today we are just two weeks away from Easter and more than half way through the 40 day period in the Church calendar known as lent – a time when we are called to repentance.

Repentance.... That is a word that perhaps we only hear occasionally in our churches today.

In simple terms, the word repentance means ‘to turn’ and it means to turn in the context of ‘feeling regret for something we have done or said’. So it embraces a real desire to not repeat something we have done or said that has had a negative impact on someone else and is not pleasing to God.

In a Tear Fund prayer diary, I read this ‘Repentance according to the Hebrew understanding, suggests a head and heart response to our separateness from God’.

Separateness from God...

Why are we separated from God? As I said last month, God loves us, but hates sin - and it is our sin that separates us from Him.

So what is it that he hates?

What exactly is sin?

Many people, if asked this question, might come up with things like, murder, rape, pornography, bullying, foul language and the like...

And they would be right - these are good examples of what God would consider to be sin, but the first original sin occurred in the Garden of Eden. It was Adam and Eve’s disobedience and rebellion against God and His command to not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God had created Adam and Eve in His own perfect image, as good and holy people without sin. But, if they ate from that tree then they would immediately gain knowledge of how to do evil, as well as good.

Adam and Eve rebelled against God’s command and were deceived by Satan to eat that fruit. This is where sin and all its evil entered into the human race.

And from this sin of rebellion follows every other kind of sin mentioned in the Scriptures.

In 1 Peter 1 verse 16, God gives us a command to ***'Be Holy because I am holy'***.

But if we want to please God and obey this command to be Holy then we need to be clear about what sin is.

The Bible is full of examples of things God warns and exhorts us not to do - and also lists the consequences of doing these things. And the reason He doesn't want us to do them (or wants us to stop doing them), is because He knows these things are not good for us or for those around us.

I will come to the New Testament shortly but I want to start with the Old Testament.

It is here that we find something of critical importance to **all followers of Christ**, but not something that I find is often taught in Churches today - because some say that with the coming of Jesus, the things I am about to talk about no longer apply. But as you will see later, this thinking is not correct.

I am talking about the importance of the Ten Commandments.

About 3,400 years ago, Moses told God's Holy People (the Jews) to learn and **OBEY** the Commandments

We have just had them read to us.

Let's take a look now, because God's Commandments give us great insight into what He considers to be sin.

First God says 'we are not to have any other god but Himself'.

For some people their god will be their work, hobby, husband, wife, new car, yacht, home - it can be any one of many things. Considering anything to be greater than God is a sin. God also refers to an idol. An idol is just the same as having a god in your life other than the one true God. Who is the one true God?

The Bible says there **is** only one God. He is the creator of everything – the heavens, the earth and all that we see around us, and everything we cannot see. The Bible says in many places He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God changed Jacob's name to Israel. The only true God is the God of Israel - the Jews. He is the God we, as Christians worship too. Contrary to popular

opinion, He is **not** the God of the Muslims or any other religion, since the God **we** worship, as well as being the God of the Jews, is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ - and most religions do not accept that Jesus is the Messiah or the Son of God. In fact, some religions have many idols, gods, and deities who they worship, bow down to and make religious sacrifices to, but Jesus is NOT one of those gods

The devil wants people to believe that everybody worships the same god and that all religious paths lead to Heaven. This contradicts the Scriptures and is therefore a lie from Satan, so don't be fooled by it! Remember, Jesus said in John chapter 14 ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."***

Jesus was born a Jew, the disciples were Jews, Paul who wrote 2/3rds of the New Testament was one of the most devout Jews, but together with the Holy Spirit they formed the Church of Jesus Christ – and Jesus is the only Son of the one true God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen?!

If, in our hearts, we place anything as being more important than the one true God, then God says we have made that thing an idol, and we must repent of it immediately or there will be consequences.

In the reading today we heard this:

***'I will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But (I love it when God says But), I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.'***

So, a rhetorical question: Are we obeying God's commands?

Let's see, because next he says ***'The LORD will not let you go unpunished if you misuse His name.'*** How many times each day, if you walk down the High Street, or turn on the TV, do you hear men, women and children misusing Father God or Jesus' Name in a blasphemous way? And not only that, but have we ever been tempted to say 'I swear by Almighty God I am telling the truth', but know in our hearts, that what we are saying is not entirely truthful?

This too is sin.

Next we read ***“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God.”***

It wasn't that long ago when every High Street shop was closed on a Sunday. I bet most of us here can remember it. Church attendance all over the Island (and the mainland) was high. Not so today. Recently I was reminded that Sunday trading was legalised in 1994 and shortly after, there were, according to the BBC (and I quote) 'ten times as many people shopping on a Sunday as those who went to Church'. Even this week the Government was trying to extend Sunday opening hours even further.

We have made an idol of shopping, business, spending and debt. Is it any wonder people are so stressed, suicides are so high, etc etc.

God's commandments are for our wellbeing! God isn't a 'party-pooper' – He created us and He alone knows what is best for us. We need to rest - do we not?!

The fifth commandment is to ***“Honour your father and mother, as the LORD your God commanded you. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”***

When we, as offspring, honour our parents, particularly in their old age, by doing what we can to help them and care for them to the best of our abilities then God gives a promise of long life for those who obey Him in this way. That's a measure of how important it is to God.

Next, we have the short, and I guess well known, commandments:

We are not to murder, nor commit adultery, we are not to steal, nor testify falsely against our neighbour, and finally not to covet anything at all that belongs to our neighbour.

We probably know these commandments, but how often do we think what they mean?

Just think for now of one: 'You must not covet things belonging to your neighbour'.

What does it mean to covet?

Strictly speaking it means 'to long to possess something that belongs to someone else'.

In the Biblical sense it means to crave after something, or to desire something eagerly. There are good things we should desire, but here it means we are not to desire something in the bad sense, similarly we have the phrase to lust after something.

It is perfectly possible to covet or lust after a new car, a new watch, a new phone a new anything - especially if the reason is that we have got bored with the existing one. In the past, I have many times lusted after a new car, the latest fashion, – the list goes on. We need to call this by its Godly name – It is coveting - and it is sin! We must repent of it, if we are to be at peace with God, and He at peace with us.

In 1 Timothy 6 v 10 it says, ***'For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.'***

When we crave after more money, for selfish reasons – God calls this sin. Is it time perhaps that we became more easily contented?

In Philippians 4 verses 11 and 12, Paul said ***'Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.'***

Paul knew the benefit and experienced great blessings that come from not coveting – not sinning!

If we think about the Commandment not to 'testify falsely against our neighbour', do we realise that includes gossip? When we talk to others about somebody's behaviour or wrongdoing, we may only know part of the situation; and if so, then we are giving distorted information to others who then make a false judgement about that person, based on our gossip. Gossip is a sin and is to be avoided.

Sin is a huge subject and it is difficult for me to do the subject justice in our short service today. I said I would refer to some New Testament Scriptures and it is important to balance Old with New. We are, after all, living under God's New Testament (or Covenant) of Grace not just law. And although that is true, Jesus Himself, said that His appearing by no means nullified The Law

(the Ten Commandments) – on the contrary - in Matthew 5 v 17, He said ***“I did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose.”***

Likewise when asked what the most important Commandment was, in Matthew chapter 22 Jesus didn't say “ignore the law - The Commandments - you are under grace alone’, **No**, he told an expert in religious law, ***“You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”***

Note that Jesus said God's command to love our neighbour, is equal with His command for us to love Him.

How then, is sin described in the New Testament? There are many examples but in the interests of time I am going to conclude with just two.

What did Jesus say? - And what did the apostle Paul say?

In Mark chapter 7, it records Jesus saying this to His disciples: ***“It is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person's heart, come:- Evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.”***

And in Galatians 5 verses 19 to 23 Paul says this:

***“When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!”***

Concerning the kind of action, words and thoughts that constitute sin, Christian author Jerry Bridges wrote a most helpful book *called ‘Respectable Sins.’* Many of you received a free gift of Michele's first book some time ago, called *‘Come on Church! Wake Up!’* and in it, on pages 77 through to 80 she lists many of those sins, with permission from the original author. If you

haven't already, you might find it helpful to read those pages some time if you are not clear what constitutes sin.

The apostle Paul challenges us not to give in to sin. In Romans 6 he says:

***“Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin.***

***Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.”***

Having said that, because we are human, we will from time to time sin, and when we do, we need to confess it to God, repent, and receive God's forgiveness, healing and restoration. Remember those wonderful words from the Bible in John's first letter: ***“the blood of Jesus, God's only Son, cleanses us from all sin. And if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”*** Keep in mind too, that in chapter 8 of John's Gospel, Jesus said to the woman caught in the act of adultery, after forgiving her: 'Go, and sin **no more.**'

I am going to finish now by reminding you that in two weeks' time we will, God willing, hear the Easter story preached from pulpits all around the world. In case you miss that opportunity to hear the Gospel message, I want to remind you, that the purpose of Jesus' death on the Cross of Calvary 2,000 years ago was to take all our sin upon Himself; to redeem us from the eternal consequences and just penalty of our sin, to forgive us of it, and open up the way of salvation through faith in Him.

If we will accept God's gracious gift to us in Jesus, and follow and obey Him, confessing and repenting of our sins, then we will all receive eternal life in Heaven when our souls leave our bodies at the point of death.

My final Scripture is this and I conclude with it.

It comes from the Book of Acts, chapter 4, where a crippled man was healed.

***“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of our people, are we being questioned today because we've done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed? Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful Name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom***

***God raised from the dead. For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says,***

***'The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.'***

***There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other Name under heaven by which we must be saved."***

**AMEN!**

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