

The Apostle Paul's Most Complete Definition of Sin

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Text: Romans 1:24-32

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Some people have the notion that since Paul is the apostle of grace, he would not speak about any specific sins. This idea shows a faulty conception of what grace really is. Grace can only be bestowed upon the unworthy. Saving grace can only be shown toward sinners. The more a person realizes the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the more he will appreciate the grace of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ spelled out sins

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19). There were many in Christ's day and many in our day who deny the above list as sins. In fact, they would call good what God says is evil. The prophet Isaiah said, "Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil" (Isa. 5:20).

Paul gives a list of sins in many of his epistles

For example, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9,10). Paul makes it clear that sin bars a person from heaven, but he reveals that a person can be washed in the blood of Christ and be cleansed from his sins and be made fit for heaven: "And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:14).

Similar lists of sins can be found in Gal. 5:19,20; Eph. 5:3-6; Col. 3:5,6. Paul makes the assertion that God's wrath is upon those who continue in those sins. Man, therefore, is lost because of his sins, and only faith in Jesus Christ can save a man from his sins.

Sin is refusing to worship and serve the Creator (1:25)

God is worthy of man's worship and service because He is the Creator. Man would not exist if God had not been pleased to make him. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). But man in his fallen state serves man instead of God. Paul commands believers not to serve man: "Ye are bought

with a price; be not the servants of men" (1 Cor. 7:23). Man needs to be constantly reminded that he is responsible to the God who created him. This is man's only true happiness. It is only as man speaks well of God that God's blessings come upon him. God is to be glorified forever. Paul ends the verse with a hearty, "Amen!" As the catechism truly says, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

Perverted sex is sin (1:26,27)

God created sex at the very outset of the human race, and established marriage in the Garden of Eden. Adultery is a profanation of marriage, but Paul shows that the human race has violated sex even to a greater degree than through adultery by committing the sin of homosexuality. This sin has been committed by both men and women. Some churches in our day approve of this type of living. Some clergymen actually marry a woman to a woman and a man to a man. The true church is to point out this perversion as sin, and tell these deviates to repent and be cleansed from this sin by the blood of Christ. The churches of Christendom may approve this sin, but God has not placed His approbation upon it.

Sin brings God's judgment of a reprobate mind (1:28)

Fallen man boasts of his knowledge which he claims is superior to the Bible. In reality, fallen man's mind is reprobate! "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).

Verse 1:28 explains all the foolish and corrupt philosophies, cults, religions, etc., that are in the world. To be given up by God is indeed a terrible judgment. Three times in this context Paul asserts that God gave the Gentiles up; He just let them go as far as any supernatural revelation is concerned. It is true, though, that God was good in sending physical blessing to the heathen Gentiles (Acts 14:16,17).

Particular sins enumerated (1:29-31)

A Chinaman who read this text once said that Paul could not have written it; some missionary in China who saw these vices in that country must have written it. The truth is that in every generation, in every country, these sins have been and still are committed.

Paul says that fallen man is full of sin. God commands the believer to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Perhaps the word "covetousness" sums up many of the sins listed in these verses. The desire for more, the desire for that which belongs to another person has produced unrighteousness, the desire for illicit sex (fornication), wickedness, and maliciousness. Envy has caused murder, strife, deceit, malignity. "A whisperer separates chief friends" (Prov. 16:28). How many friendships have been broken up by gossip. "More people have been run down by gossip than by automobiles."

The greatest sin is that of hatred for God. Man is to love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind, and his neighbor as himself. Hell will be filled with people who were too proud to come to Christ as a lost sinner and be cleansed by His blood. Our Lord said that people hate Him without a cause (John 15:18-25).

Man is continually inventing evil things, especially new ways to sin against God. God has commanded children to honor their father and their mother. Instead of obeying this command, many children are disobedient to parents. Obviously, the obedience God commands must be in conformity to His Word. Man is not to obey any law that is contrary to God's Word, whether the command comes from parents, church, government, or any other source. The Psalmist said that there are those who frame unrighteous laws: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frames mischief by a law?" (Psa. 94:20). When the Jewish Sanhedrin commanded the apostles not to preach in the name of Christ, "Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The Allies of World War II refused to hold a man innocent when he obeyed an unrighteous command by his superior officer. Inferiors are to obey superiors only when the command is right in the sight of God.

There is no more complete listing of sin anywhere in the Bible than is found in the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans. This listing of sin is an essential part of the irresistible logic that Paul employs. The purpose of God is to prove that all people need the righteousness of God which is in Christ Jesus. Paul, therefore, lists every sin that the human race commits to prove that man is a guilty sinner and needs to be redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

In 1:31 man is described as lacking spiritual understanding. Man is a covenant breaker. First and foremost, man breaks his covenant with God. If a covenant is simply an agreement between God and man, then the Bible contains many covenants. One of the most important covenants was made between the nation Israel and God at Mount Sinai. The people of Israel promised God they would do His will, yet they broke the covenant at Mount Sinai by making the golden calf. The history of Israel is one continuous record of breaking God's covenant. The Old Testament prophets are full of warnings as to the judgments that God would send because of the unfaithfulness of Israel. The judgments finally came in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. The Gentiles were no better than Israel. God's verdict is this: the whole world is guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).

Man not only does not love God, but is without natural affection. This lack of affection is illustrated by mothers who abandon their own children. Man is so full of hatred that Paul describes him as implacable, impossible to appease. A person often wants mercy shown to him but refuses to show mercy to others. Our Lord illustrated this fact in his parable of the man who owed \$12,000,000 and asked for mercy and obtained it; yet when he met a man who owed him \$15, he refused to show him mercy (Matt. 18:23-38).

Sinners are worthy of death (1:32)

Sin is against a holy God; a holy God must judge sin. The death to which this text refers is not merely physical death, but eternal separation from God in Hell. Most people know in their

hearts that sin deserves God's judgment, yet they approve sin. This fact is one of the great proofs that sin brings a reprobate mind. Truly Romans 6:23 is a fact: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

History and experience confirm the truth that Paul presents concerning man having pleasure in them that practice these sins. How often people boast about their drunkenness, immorality, stealing, etc. What a change takes place when a person is saved. He no longer is proud of his sins but is ashamed of the life he used to live: "What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" (Rom. 6:21). Only when one sees the heinousness of sin does he realize his need of the grace of God.