

**I. Introduction**

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood and to part five of our series called Freedom. Since Easter, we have been looking at the forces that rule our lives, steal our joy, and hurt our relationships.
- B. And we have been seeing how Christ has set us free.
- C. Here is our topic for today:
  - 1. Freedom from Guilt

**II. Whatever Became of Sin**

- A. In 1973, a famous psychologist named Karl Menninger published a book that went on to become a best seller. His book was called *Whatever Became of Sin?*
- B. Menninger warned that a society that lost its feeling of guilt over sin would load itself up with psychological disturbances. The passage of time has proven he was right.
- C. Scripture speaks of those who have had their “*consciences seared with a hot iron*” (1 Timothy 4:2).
- D. You know me, and you know that I love to preach on grace. Grace is the forgiving power of God, based on the cross of Christ, freely given to all who believe.
- E. But there can be no grace without guilt. There can be no amazing grace without amazing guilt.
- F. Grace fills the gap between our evil and God’s perfection. To shrink that gap is to just to shrink grace, and to turn it into something it is not.
  - 1. Grace is not leniency.
  - 2. Grace is not the defining away of sin.
  - 3. Grace is not God being nice.
  - 4. Grace is not God winking at your contribution to the weight of evil in the world.
- G. Under grace, God took extreme measures to defeat sin and the wages of sin. The Scriptures describe in painful detail the horrific agony of Jesus on the Cross. That suffering and death, that shedding of blood, that underserved favor at unspeakable cost, represents the horribleness of your sin.
- H. The awfulness of sin dictated the awfulness of the penalty that had to be paid.
- I. To shrink sin is to shrink the cross. It is to make light of all that Jesus did for us.
- J. I know the word SIN sounds ancient, out of date, like it’s from the horse and buggy era.
- K. But what can you say about a society that has no vocabulary for moral evil that offends God, hurts people, and damages relationships?
- L. Whatever became of sin? We need to talk about it, understand it, and bring it back as a category, or else there is no salvation, no grace, and no hope for the human race.
- M. The same goes for guilt. Sin and guilt are cousins. To have sin is to have guilt... and to have sin, but not guilt, is to become a very dangerous person.
- N. To live without an awareness of sin is to live without a conscience, and anybody like that is evil.
- O. Whatever became of sin? We desperately need to understand it.
- P. In the Bible, in the New Testament, the main Greek word for sin is hamartia. It means missing the mark; missing the center of the bullseye. I say this because there is a theological category called hamartiology.
  - 1. Hamartiology: an organized summary of everything the Bible says about sin.
- Q. I’d like to put on my professor hat, and give you the basic ideas of hamartiology. I know this is a sermon on freedom from guilt, so this is all weird, but you cannot be free from guilt if you don’t even know what you have. Instead, that unacknowledged guilt will go underground, turn toxic, and make your world worse than it needs to be.
- R. So, let’s dive into the deep end of the sin and guilt pool, because then we can discover even deeper wonders in a truly gracious rescuer named Jesus.

**III. Hamartiology 101****A. The HOLINESS OF GOD.**

- 1. Scripture describes God’s holiness in two ways:
  - a) MAJESTIC HOLINESS is that quality in God by which he is unapproachable in glory, utterly above, and distinct from all his creation.
    - (1) *To see God in his majestic holiness is to be traumatized. He dwells in unapproachable light, and no one can see him (1 Timothy 1:16).*
    - (2) When Daniel encountered God, he fell down as a dead man. When John encountered him, he was overwhelmed with fear. When Isaiah encountered God in his holiness, he cried out, “Woe is me!”
    - (3) God is not like you. He is not human. He exists on an immeasurably higher plane than any of us. His majesty is awesome and awful and dreadful and awe-inducing all at once.
      - (a) *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory (Isaiah 6:3).*
  - b) MORAL HOLINESS is that quality in God by which he maintains his own moral perfection, hates evil with a passion, and demands purity in his moral creatures.
    - (1) I am trying to make God bigger and us smaller.
    - (2) This is why we have the laws of God. Why we have the Ten Commandments. Why we have all the commandments of Scripture. God’s laws are God’s laws because God’s heart is God’s heart. He didn’t have to make up his laws. He just let his own perfection flow out in a moral code.
    - (3) Get that?
    - (4) To break God’s laws is to get in trouble with the holiness of God, and because God’s holiness is infinite, the trouble is infinite too.

(a) Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (Romans 3:19, NKJV).

- (5) There it is. All the world is guilty before God. The holiness of God leads to the justice of God. The justice of God leads to the wrath of God. The wrath of God leads to the condemnation of God. They're all connected, and the Bible is super clear on all of these things.
- (6) Behind the Cross lies the initially uncomfortable, but ultimately beautiful, reality of an infinitely holy God. If God were not holy, Jesus would not have died.
- (7) The holiness of God implies two very scary truths for any thinking person:
- (8) The first is that sinful people cannot dwell in God's presence. If God is holy, anyone who has sinned stands alienated from him. In other words, if God is holy, you can't be his friend without measuring up to his standards. So the Bible says we are "alienated from the life of God," and, we were "alienated and enemies" of God "by wicked works" (Ephesians 4:18, Colossians 1:21).
- (9) This is horrible news.
- (10) But wait, there's more, and the next truth is worse:
- (11) God's holiness also implies that sinful people fall under condemnation from the justice of God. It's not just that we're alienated from God; as sinners we're condemned by God, too. I know this feeds into a lot of negative stereotypes about God, but we do ourselves no favors by avoiding the difficult truth. God judges sin. The Bible says, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness" of people (Romans 1:18). Jesus warned anyone who stood aloof from his way of forgiveness that "the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). This wrath lasts forever (Matthew 25:46).
  - (a) I guess this just isn't going to be one of those feel good sermons.
- (12) This guilt goes deep. So let's keep going deeper, okay?

#### B. THE DEPTHS OF HUMAN SIN

1. SINFUL CHOICES: Sin is doing, saying, or even thinking anything that is against the holy will of God.
  - a) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23, NKJV).
  - b) For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin. (Ecclesiastes 7:20, NKJV).
  - c) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8, NKJV).
  - d) For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10, NKJV).
  - e) When you lie, you commit a personal sin. When you're unkind in the parking lot. When you steal. When you break any law of God. You commit a personal sin, and you compound your guilt.
  - f) There is no fact of theology easier to prove than that the human race is a bunch of sinners. No one is exempt. You're a sinner. I'm a sinner. Welcome to church.
  - g) Don't take it personally. You're a sinner from a long line of sinners, because sin isn't just doing, saying, or thinking bad stuff. Sin is what we are on the inside.
2. SINFUL NATURE: Sin is a twist in the fabric of our being that makes us morally evil, by nature, from the moment of our conception.
  - a) You're born a sinner. You inherited a sinful nature from your father, going all the way back to Adam.
  - b) You're not a sinner because you sin. You sin because you're a sinner. It's not just what you do, it's what you are.
    - (1) Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5, NKJV).
  - c) It is a myth that people are basically good. We were created that way, that's true, but we didn't stay that way. Ever since sin entered the world, the whole human race is infected with it. There's a moral twist, a deviancy, in human nature, from conception through birth.
  - d) This doesn't make us horrible people. It makes us guilty people who need a Savior.
  - e) And just to be complete, there's one more side to the depths of human sin.
3. SINFUL STATUS: God holds you guilty of the original sin of your father Adam.
  - a) This is actually a fantastically wonderful teaching in the Bible, which I won't be going into today.
  - b) We all sinned when Adam sinned.
    - (1) Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned [when Adam sinned.] (Romans 5:12, NKJV).
  - c) Bottom line: You have made sinful choices, because of your sinful nature, and you have a sinful status before the court of heaven.
  - d) Sitting as the Judge in the court of heaven, is God himself. Holy to an infinite degree.
    - (1) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:31, NKJV).
    - (2) For our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:29, NKJV).

#### IV. Sin and Guilt

- A. My middle name is "guilt trip". All my life, I have struggled with guilt. God's holiness scares me. It scarred me as kid, and lingers with me today. I don't think that's all a bad thing.
- B. Our culture is swirling down the toilet. One of the reasons is that we have done away with sin. We have redefined it as a preference, or as a disease, or as a psychological disorder.
- C. It may result in those things, but sin is far deeper.
- D. Sin is simply rebellion against God. In the gospels, people didn't want Jesus telling them what to do, and they still don't. It is rebellion against God. It is setting your own opinions above God's opinions.
  1. Sexual sins.
  2. Financial sins.

3. Sins of gossip and slander.
  4. Sins neglect. Sins of commission. Sins of omission.
    - a) If you really were in touch with how much you mess up in the sin department every single day, you would have a much greater fear of God, and a much greater appreciation for the grace that doesn't fry you to a crispy critter in three nano-seconds flat.
    - b) The simple fact is this:
  - E. The measure of forgiveness you can feel is directly proportional to the measure of guilt you feel.
- V. The Story of the Sinful Woman
- A. The gospel of Luke tells the story of a Jesus eating dinner at a Pharisees house. So a bunch of very good people who do not see themselves as sinners.
  - B. While he is there, a sinful woman comes in. She anoints Jesus feet with oil, and washes them with her tears, and dries them with her hair.
  - C. This sounds weird in our culture, but washing a guests feet was a normal thing in that culture, with dusty streets and open sandals.
  - D. The religious people were offended that Jesus would let this sinful woman touch him.
  - E. Jesus reads their minds. He asks a question. If two people were forgiven a debt, one of fifty bucks and the other of fifty thousand bucks, who would be more grateful?
  - F. The religious people give the obvious answer: the one who was forgiven a greater debt.
  - G. Jesus says they're right. Then he says this:
    1. *Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. "You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. "You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." (Luke 7:44-47, NKJV).*
  - H. Why is grace not amazing to so many Christians?
  - I. Because they have been, in their own minds, forgiven little. They are Pharisees, who, if they need forgiving, only need it a little. This is our culture today. It is the Christian culture today too, unfortunately.
  - J. Sin is still sin. What God called sin in the Bible days is still sin today.
  - K. A Christian author posted a video on social media of a pastor. He stood in his pulpit and was cussing some of the top level swear words. Sorry, I don't want my kids listening to that. Then this pastor went on and redefined biblical sexuality. He said he had a lot of problems with how the Bible defines sexuality, and basically the Bible was wrong.
  - L. It really bothered me.
  - M. But what bothered me more is all the Christians commenting how awesome this guy is.
  - N. That's not awesome, that's redefining grace into something it is not. It's numbing the Christian conscience, and searing it, and desensitizing it to sin. Stop it.
  - O. Grace is not God being flexible.
    1. Grace is God being inflexible to the point of death.
  - P. Grace is not God being permissive.
    1. Grace is God pouring out wrath and damnation on that which he refuses to permit, only, instead of pouring it out on the sinner, he pours out his wrath on the substitute... so now let's talk about that.
- VI. The Greatness of Redemption
- A. THE REDEEMER: Jesus Christ went to the cross to set you free from sin and all its horrible consequences, because he loved you.
    1. His motive was love. He died on the cross because he loved you.
      - a) *For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:7, 8, NKJV).*
    2. Sometimes a church can feel like a travel agent for a guilt trip.
    3. No matter how many prayers I prayed or good works I squeezed out, I was sure God was judging me for my sins. I cringed to think of standing in his presence. Even though I was saved, I still stooped beneath a hundred pound sack of guilt.
    4. So I did what any self-respecting church kid would do: I made myself super-busy for Jesus. I served him all the time. If the church doors were open, I was there. But my service wasn't out of love; it was out of guilt. I didn't know it at the time, but my service was a form of penance, and I didn't even believe in penance.
    5. Today, I can say with all belief that I am permanently, profoundly, and perfectly forgiven by God forever. This is not because God is wimpy, but because the Cross of Christ is strong.
    6. What made the difference?
    7. An understanding of the Cross and what happened for me the day Jesus died.
  - B. THE TRANSFER OF SIN: When he died on the cross, every sin you have ever committed, was lifted out of you and transferred to Christ.
    1. *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6, NKJV).*
    2. *who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed. (1 Peter 2:24, NKJV).*
      - a) *Jesus, through his judgments and tortures, did not cry out. It wasn't until our sins hit him, that he began to cry out:*
        - (1) *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46, NKJV).*

- C. THE JUDGMENT OF CHRIST: God punished Christ for your sins instead of punishing you.
1. *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. (Romans 5:6, NKJV).*
  2. *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (1 Corinthians 15:3, NKJV).*
  3. The astounding announcement of the prophets and apostles of old is the good news of a forgiving God.
  4. In Christ, you stand fully, completely, perfectly, everlastingly forgiven of all your sins, past, present, and future. Even if you went out and invented a brand new sin – a big, juicy, heinous sin no one had ever done before – your forgiveness from God wouldn't even flicker.
  5. This is not due to God's leniency, softness, niceness, or “unconditional” love. To reduce the biblically glorious wonder of forgiveness into a divine wimpiness, by which the Creator winks at sin, is to set yourself up for a lifetime of a troubled conscience.
  6. We need a forgiveness that means something – a forgiveness so strong that a thousand shouts of devilish accusation can't shake it. And that is exactly what God has lavished upon us, courtesy the Cross of Christ.
- D. A FINISHED WORK: Jesus, in his time on the Cross, did everything required to pay for all your sins in full.
1. *So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (John 19:30, NKJV).*
  2. This is why we talk about the finished work of Christ.
- E. TOTAL FORGIVENESS: Because of the finished work of Christ, you have forgiveness full and free, once for all and forever.
1. *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus... (Romans 8:1).*
  2. He died horribly. Painfully. In utter agony. Forsaken and alone. We bow in humble adoration at the bloody crucifixion of our precious Savior.
  3. *Because of that death, God is free to dismiss your sins from his presence. He sees no guilt in you – you stand faultless before him (Jude 24).*
  4. Because of what Christ did.
  5. Not because of what you did. No, not even a tiny bit.
  6. Don't you think Christ's sacrifice was enough? Is there anything you can add? Are there coins you might supply to sweeten the deal with God? Did Jesus accidentally leave a few sins behind for you to atone for?
  7. Crazy-talk.
  8. *In his final breath, Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30) – the best words ever uttered on planet earth. The payment for your sin was finished. The judgment of God against you was finished. Your guilt and shame were finished, once for all, on the cross, by Christ alone.*
  9. *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).*
  10. That is why you can say today, I am forgiven – totally, irrevocably, everlastingly, forgiven – for all my sins, past, present, and future. You possess a hard-fought, blood-bought, paid in full, comprehensive, once for all, perfectly legitimized, unassailable forgiveness from the heart of your magnificently holy God. You did not deserve it. You did not earn it. You can't contribute to it. You received it the day God joined you to Christ.
- F. STRONG FAITH: God wants you to lean so heavily on the Cross of Christ that the devil can't stick in a guilt-trip edgewise.
1. Trust him. Believe him.
  2. When you feel guilty, tell him. Bring your sins back to the cross and leave them there.
  3. Come back to God. Be the prodigal son or daughter coming home again and again and again.
  4. You can never exhaust the power of the blood of Christ.
    - a) *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, NKJV).*