

The Sin Virus
Psalm 51:1-12, 1 John 1:5-10

Brothers and sisters, there's a story about an American President who dutifully went off to church one Sunday morning. Now I don't know why his wife didn't attend service with him, but apparently she didn't - because when the President returned home she asked him what the sermon was about. "Sin" he replied rather abruptly. "Well what did the minister have to say about it?" she persisted. "He was against it" said the President.

And brothers and sisters, I suspect that if someone asked us what our minister, or our church, or the bible had to say about sin we might give a similar answer.

Sin? Oh, its bad, stay away from it, don't do it. We all need saving from it, it's why Jesus had to die on the cross.

And then we'd likely move on to talk about something else because we don't really have too much more to say about and

even if we did – we might not want to say much more about it because it is unpopular to talk about sin these days...

We'd rather talk about how God loves us because, as the saying goes *"you will attract more flies with honey than vinegar!"* But if you stop and think about it you will also attract a lot of flies with a pile of bull-manure and the truth of the matter brothers and sisters is that if we are talking about God's love without talking about our sin we're only talking a load of bull-crap.

The influential Presbyterian pastor and theologian Rev. Francis Schaeffer once said that if he had only an hour to talk to a modern-minded man he would spend 45-50 minutes on the negative, the sin – then he would take 10 -15 minutes to preach the gospel. For unless he understands what is wrong, he will not be ready to listen to and understand the positive.

So brothers and sisters, the degree to which God's love is significant and impactful for you is directly related to the

degree to which you understand the depth of sin and how it affects you.

As our Lord Jesus said in Luke 7:47 *“Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”*

So I want to encourage us this morning not to be afraid or uncomfortable of talking about sin – because if we speak about sin biblically... its only going to increase our thankfulness for God’s love and it will cause us to love Him more.

And our current pandemic circumstances are actually the perfect time to have this conversation because there are so many object lessons, that we can draw from the Coronavirus to help us better understand what the bible says about sin.

Let’s start with looking at how the virus can teach us something about our awareness and willingness to talk about sin.

So with the corona virus - even though it is something negative and even scary – we’re all aware of it, and we’re willing to talk about it, and we realize how important it is that we understand it and we want to know how it can affect us and we want to know how we must respond to it.

In fact its precisely because it is negative and scary that the public health authorities have worked to ensure there is a widespread awareness of this virus and we all agree that it would be foolish to ignore it and pretend it isn’t negative and scary – and this is how we ought to be with sin as well.

Scripture instructs us to be aware of our sin 1 John 1:8 where it says *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”* and in Psalm 51:3 where David says *“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.”*

Brothers and sisters, we need to be aware of sin and we need to know what it is all about – are you willing to take on that kind of an attitude?

But let's clarify that with the Coronavirus, making ourselves aware in a way that is helpful is not constantly looking at social media, reading posts about how medical systems and mortuaries are being overrun, or posting pictures of people on ventilators, or sharing news reports about PPE shortages, or opinion pieces that speculate on the devastating impact this could have on our economy and society in the future.

This is not awareness – that is falling prey to media sensationalism and we'll be all over the place emotionally and overwhelmed mentally, and we'll start hoarding toilet paper!

Instead, we need to find good reliable sources of information, and learn what we can from those sources and then respond appropriately by adjusting our daily lives and routines as needed. Do you see the difference?

In the same way always being aware of our sin is **not** constantly dredging up all the bad things we've done and berating ourselves, or always focusing on the terrible things

that happen in our society, or being perfectionistic and hyper-critical of ourselves and everyone else...

That is a sensationalism of another sort and will only cause us to be overwhelmed emotionally and mentally and it leads to self-condemnation. And brothers and sisters – if talking about sin tends to lead you in this direction, today's message on sin is meant to set you free from that!

So.... listen to what God says about self-condemnation in 1 John 3:20 *"If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts..."* God is greater than our self-condemnation from sin – we can trust in His love.

So being aware of the Coronavirus and how we ought to respond requires that we get good reliable information from authoritative sources like our public health officials and some of that good reliable information which is so important has been the list of symptoms which the virus causes – because we can't see the Coronavirus but we can see the symptoms it causes in us.

In the same way we can't see Sin but we can see what it causes in our lives and in this world around us.

But how does that occur? With a virus there needs to be a host, because a virus isn't really alive on its own. In the same way sin needs a host, it needs something to infect and affect in order to really come to its expression, and then we can see how it twists and warps and distorts and misdirects what is good and causes it to become sinful.

That partially what Paul is explaining about sin in Romans 7:13 where he says *"in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death... so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."*

You see that is what is so terrible about sin, yes the symptoms can be bad – but what is worse is that sin is taking what is good and causing it to become sinful.

Right now if we see people gathering together in large groups, or shaking hands, or kissing each other on the cheek –

normally good things – we react with concern and indignation because of the coronavirus has turned such things "sinful."

And if we feel a bit of frustration and even anger that these good things – and the many other good things and business and sports and courts have had to be shut down right now – because of how they have been affected by the virus...

Imagine for a minute how God feels that His amazing good creation and the amazing and wonderful human beings He created in His image to rule as His stewards have been affected by sin and become sinful.

Imagine how God feels as He watches the many ways in which sin warps and twists and distorts His creation away from His intentions and designs for it and how it was supposed to bless us and cause us to flourish... and how we go along with this and celebrate it in parades!

Perhaps maybe we will understand just a little bit as to why God hates sin, why it is so offensive to him – and why has

determined that He is going to do something about it, because God can never get used to sin affecting His good creation as the new normal.

But its easy for us to adapt to sin like that – just look at how easy we adapt to how the coronavirus has impacted us!

Three months ago we would have never imagined that we'd be getting used to standing six feet apart in the grocery store, that we'd be ok with wearing masks to get our hair cut, or that we'd be sanitizing our hands every time we entered a building – but now we're getting used to it, it's the new normal.

And sin has been around in our world a loooooong time – it fact much of it seems normal to us, so much so that we wouldn,t even really know what it is and how it effects us. At the most we might have a vague sense that something is kind of off – because of the occasional tragedies that occur.

So, a key part of God's plan to deal with sin, and how it makes us sinful, is help us see sin – and this is why God gave His

people the Law of Moses. It helps us come to know and understand sin and how it affects us. As Paul writes in Romans 3:20 *"through the law we become conscious of our sin."* And in Romans 7:7 *"I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law."*

Now earlier on I said that its important to get reliable information about the coronavirus – and some of the most helpful information that has been made available are the specific symptoms that the virus produces in us.

We all know now, that if you have a fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat or runny nose, that these are cause for concern – you may have Covid-19 and you need to respond accordingly.

In the same way the Mosaic Law – especially the 10 Commandments – identifies the symptoms that we need to watch for. Putting any other god before God, making or worshiping or serving an idol, taking the name of Yahweh in vain, not observing the Sabbath, not honoring your father and

mother, murder, committing adultery, stealing, false witness, coveting... these are symptoms of sin – they are sinful.

So AS WE come to find ourselves struggling with any of these symptoms, God is helping us come to realize that we have a problem with disobedience, we're sinful and we have been infected by sin.

Now coming to realize this is a bit like waking up in the morning and your throat is a bit sore – and when that happens to me there's a slight twinge of fear that it could be something more serious. I start wondering if somehow maybe I've picked up the coronavirus somewhere... and then I begin to wonder how it would affect me?

If I were to get sick with Covid-19 would I get really sick with severe symptoms and wind up in the hospital or would I only feel like I had a mild cold and get over it in a couple weeks?

What if I developed unusual symptoms and I didn't realize they were Covid-19 related? Or worse yet... what if I've had

the virus and I'm not showing any symptoms and I've been spreading it around to everyone else – I'm one of those asymptomatic spreaders!!

Well – I could find out right? I could go and get tested and then I would know for certain! But to be honest there's a part of me that would rather not know.

Because what if I did test positive? Then I would have to contact everyone I'd been in contact with - they would have to get tested, I would have to stay at home for at least two weeks or longer – and what if someone else caught the virus from me, got really sick and died, I'd be responsible for that!

So I think many of us – if our symptoms aren't serious – would rather not know if we have the virus or not.

It works the same way with sin brothers and sisters. Many of us don't really show severe cases of the symptoms that are outlined in the 10 Commandments. We don't worship idols, we don't murder people, we are not stealing things, we're not

committing adultery... overall, we're pretty good people – we might have some sin, but its not really a severe case...

Or worse yet we might think the good things we do outweigh any sin that affects us and we don't realize we're spreading spiritual pride all over the place and how contagious and dangerous that is – we're asymptomatic self-righteousness spreaders!

And if we were honest, there's a part of us that doesn't want to know how deeply we are affected by sin - because that cuts right to the heart of our identity and our self esteem.

Because if we can't hope in who we choose to be and the good things we are capable of that contribute to making things a little bit better in this world... because the truth is that sin has affected them as well, then we have lost all hope... and that is a dark and scary place to be.

That is why the Romans 6:23 says *"the wages of sin is death!"*

And we have all had a small taste of what it is like to be in a dark and scary place over the past couple of months as we've watched the world come to an abrupt standstill because there is no medicine to cure Covid-19 and there is no vaccine to protect us against this coronavirus.

And part of the reason why we continue to scroll through our social media feeds is because we are looking for signs of hope – something... anything... that might indicate things aren't as bad as we fear they are. We are looking for some good news.

Now I can appreciate the fact that the media is aware of this, and to their credit they've tried to find and report on "good news" stories during this pandemic.

You've probably seen some of them as well - feel good stories about how a long-lost dog was reunited with its owner, fire departments doing drive-by birthday requests for kids, manufacturing companies using their facilities to make hand sanitizer and protective gear, or that the gov't is offering a financial assistance package for people who were laid off...

And we appreciate these little bits and pieces of positivity... and we especially appreciate the gov't being able to help us.

Because dealing with the coronavirus hasn't just impacted people's health, it has affected our entire global economy and shutting down travel and business has affected our capacity to honor and fulfill contractual obligations that we have.

Just because we're laid off work and not making any money doesn't mean that the bank isn't going to ask for our monthly mortgage payment! We still owe – even when we don't have the capacity to pay, unless someone else steps in to help us.

In the same way brothers and sisters, sin affects us and our ability and desire to keep the covenantal obligations that we owe to God - and it causes us to be unfaithful to Him, disloyal to Him, and deliberately disobedient to Him.

But our covenant relationship with God is not something that can be overlooked or ignored, and our inability to pay God what we owe Him incurs covenant penalties, much like how

failing to honor a contract results in owing additional fines, and there is no way we can honor the covenant or pay the penalties for breaking it – that's the reality sin brings about in our covenant relationship with God.

So yes, it is good news when we hear that Jesus has come to not only to pay the covenant penalties for us, but that He is also going to assume responsibility for our covenant obligations with God and keep them perfectly for us!

And this is what Jesus accomplished in his ministry on earth and through his death on the cross – amen! But brothers and sisters most of us simply stop there in our understanding of sin and our faith in Christ – and it is to our own detriment that we do so. Let me explain...

With the coronavirus – as much as we need and appreciate the financial assistance, we all know that this does not address the underlying source of the problem right now. In the same way forgiveness of our sinful deeds, while important and needed - does not deal with the root of how sin infects us.

Dealing with the root of the issue would be like hearing the news that doctors and scientist had found a person who was born with natural anti-bodies to the coronavirus!

In fact the virus couldn't even survive around them because the anti-bodies were a part of their DNA and existed in every cell in their body, so the virus was eliminated by just coming into contact with them.

And scientists had discovered that it was possible to isolate this DNA and then inject it into other people and it gradually spreads throughout their body eliminating the virus, healing the symptoms and repairing any damage that was caused!

And plans have been put into place to partner with drug companies and gov't health organizations to multiply and distribute this person's DNA to the general public!

Right away we would all see how this is even better news and it gives greater hope! Because... it actually addresses and can fix what is causing all the bad news and hopelessness.

Now I think you can see where all this is going - but what I hope you also see is how having a proper understanding of sin and how it affects us causes us to properly understand how Jesus is actually the solution to it and is thus really good news!

The better we understand sin – the “gooder” the good news of gospel of Jesus becomes for us.

So, let's draw the connections from our example. When the Word of God becomes human in Jesus Christ, a human nature is produced that is antithetical to sin, sin can't infect or affect it or twist it or warp it.

In fact, the reverse it takes place – it begins to un-twist and un-warp sin's effect on us and the creation, it redeems and restores, and it deals with the root cause of the symptoms.

And the Holy Spirit is the one who takes Jesus' actual human nature and infuses it into our actual human nature – this is what Baptism represents - so that gradually we become less and less affected by sin, and we show fewer symptoms.

This is what the bible calls being sanctified, and we are promised in Philippians 1:3 that *“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* and it is also why Jesus says things like *“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.”*

What is more naturally human than body and blood?? So it's not just accidental or symbolic that Jesus gives us bread as his body or the cup as his blood. When we take the Lord's supper, by faith through the Holy Spirit, we are literally receiving Jesus' human nature which and being transformed so we become antithetical to sin as well.

As the church fathers used to say *“He became like us – so we will become like Him.”*

So brothers and sisters, may the Holy Spirit help us to see how understanding sin biblically in this way actually gives us much more reason to hope in Jesus... and all the more reason to love God for accomplishing His plan to deal with sin and our sinfulness in such a redemptive and restorative manner!

So if someone asks you later on today *“What was the sermon about this morning?”* You can answer *“sin”* and hopefully they will press a bit further and ask *“Well... what did the minister have to say about it?”*

I hope you have a good conversation brothers and sisters.

Amen. Let's pray