



# THE KINGDOM

## SIN (Genesis 3)

**Sunday 28 February 2021**

*EXTENDED SERMON TRANSCRIPT*

We ended last week sitting in afterglow of the creation of all life, image bearers in union with God, each other and creation, authority and rulership – God's space and our space in unity – and they all lived happily ever after... for 1 page. Then comes tragedy of a kingdom being shattered by what we call the 'fall' or 'original sin'.

Now I want to talk about SIN today – what is it and how deep it goes, what does it do to us and what can be done about it. And already you may have feelings about this topic – some may be thinking, “well it’s about time”, others maybe feel like, “here we go, this is going to be really uplifting (not!)” I feel pretty vulnerable talking about this, partly because I’m very experienced in the topic but also because I’m a little gun-shy at being interpreted as negative – but stick with me you’ll discover that this conversation is not only going to be challenging but also hopeful for your everyday. As it should because the gospel will take you down into the helplessness of your situation and up to the heights of your liberation.

**So, what is sin and how deep does it go?** Firstly, 'sin' is any behaviour that disobeys God's will and way. God said don't eat from that tree and Eve and Adam disobeyed about that tree. But down another notch, 'sin' can be something you do and something you don't do – sins of *commission* are the wrong things we do. And the Bible is full of lists like Galatians 5:19-21:

*“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.”*

Sins of *omission* are the right things we don't do. Jesus said, "Woe to you Pharisees – you are

scrupulous tithers but you neglect to do justice and love God." 1 John 3:17-18 also reminds us that, *"whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"*

I haven't murdered anyone lately and I think I'd get a pass mark with most of the 10 commandments but I don't even know where to begin when it comes to sins of omission. What good things have I neglected to do? Recently one of my spiritual heroes died. His ability to put simple answers to tough questions was astounding. He appeared to be a man of such integrity and godliness. He sold millions of books. Then after his death we all discovered that this famous man was a misogynistic, habitual abuser of women. Many have been so disappointed and there has been lots of commentary on social media asking why and how this could be, and who within his organisation really knew but covered it up. It made me realise something: often sins of commission grow from sins of omission. *What good thing do we neglect, what questionable thing or culture do we overlook, that ends up in something worse?* Be that in our own personal lives, our marriages, in our families, churches or beyond. What do we omit before we commit - do we omit the good thing of accountability, using our time wisely, having healthy boundaries, or speaking up when you see something that's not ok. What good things do we neglect? (e.g. The Brittney Higgins rape case and the Parliament House culture, or the Chanel Contos calling out the sexualised behaviour of Private School boys - both appear to be related to cultures of alcohol abuse and the objectification of women and non-consensual sex.) How many conversations do we skip, behaviours we ignore, and cultures we overlook that end in someone getting hurt?

In fact most Royal Commissions such as the one into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse demonstrate the systemic failure of leaders to do the right thing in relation to reporting abuse by other members of the clergy, or acting in such a way as to minimise its reoccurrence (e.g. moving a priest to another parish).

The same could be said for corporations such as the Board of Crown Casino Group who lost their license. What suspect activities were overlooked for the sake of profitability?

Eve cops the blame for taking and eating fruit first - perhaps hers was a sin of commission but there is no line in there that says, "Adam cried out, "Hey Eve, that's wrong, we should just trust God on this!" So his was a sin of omission. Much of the damage is done in a life or an organisation by neglecting to do the good thing at the right time. Isn't that the story of the Good Samaritan? I'm just realising that what I don't do or what I neglect can be far more important than I give credit.

But lets dig deeper because under our behaviours are beliefs. And what if those beliefs get distorted? Say, about God's true heart and intentions for us? Enter stage left a new voice: the serpent; a representation of the Satan and an evil counter-kingdom calls into

question God's goodness: "Did God really say don't eat from any tree?" And then calls into question God's trustworthiness: "You surely will not die. He is limiting you! If you obey God, you're missing out on something, and that you'll never really be happy. God is maybe not that good, not that trustworthy..." And if that fills your heart like it did Eve then what does it result in? Can I suggest it produces 2 common responses:

- **Fear:** maybe I could be happier doing what I want maybe I'm missing out.
- **Pride:** maybe I know better than God what is good and evil for my life so I'll take it from here. Pride takes God off the throne and puts ourself on it.

What often lies at the heart of our disobeying Gods will and way is fear and pride.

But I want to press this just a little further. I was stunned at the thought from Tim Keller, quoting from Jonathan Edwards, that most virtue in society to do the right thing is also motivated by - Fear and Pride. Which Edwards says is not all bad or the world would be utter anarchy!

**Fear**, for example: I don't speed because I don't want to lose my license. I don't cheat on my tax because I don't want to get audited. I don't view explicit content because I don't want to get caught. I don't verbally abuse that colleague at work because I don't want to be subject to a formal complaint. *We do the good thing because we are afraid of being punished or losing control.*

And the other is **pride**: I give to the poor because it feels good or it makes me look generous. I want to save the environment or join a protest march on Australia Day because it makes me look like I have a social conscience. I don't swear or get drunk or sleep around because I don't want to be like 'those people'. *Doing the good thing makes us look good, its about our glory.*

So, I just got through telling you that fear and pride are at the heart of Adam and Eve's sin. But now Edwards is saying people are virtuous only because they want to stay in control (fear) and work for their own glory (pride). Fear and pride work both ways in your sin, and they can also work in your virtues. If you are asking yourself, "should I sin?" you've already sinned...

I think to myself, "Oh my goodness, this is not just about what I do but what good thing I neglect to do. And this is not just about believing the wrong things, but also the fear and pride that fuel my bad behaviour, as well as how often are my virtuous behaviours just control and image management - fear or pride in disguise? How often is my 'not sinning' fuelled by sin? How deep does my sin go when even my goodness has sin at the root?" I think Paul understood this in Romans 7. He understood what a wretch he really was, how hopeless the situation. Or in 1 Timothy 1 he called himself "*the worst of all sinners.*" This

flawed me. I realise more than ever how easily my supposed virtuous righteous acts are like as Isaiah 64 says, "*just filthy rags.*"

I realise how much I need a saviour. I need the grace of God everywhere – like Paul, I'm the wretched man. The gospel takes me all the way down to the realisation of my total depravity and helplessness to even attempt to live even remotely a righteous life.

**So, what does sin do to us?** The consequence of all this is that we all experience hell-on-earth, now (although many of us picture hell as some future state). Later in this 'Kingdom' series we will address the nature of hell, but for now, understand that if hell is living in the ultimate outcome of our rebellion then, even now, we and those around us can experience a foretaste of that destination in the same way we can experience a foretaste of heaven when our lives are aligned with Jesus and His kingdom.

A brief summary of this section of the chapter could be summarised down to three consequences – **shame** (Genesis 3:7-9), **blame** (Genesis 3:10-13) and **pain** (Genesis 3:14-19).

In Genesis 2:25 Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. Now in Genesis 3:7-9 we read they are naked and ashamed, and afraid, and covering up, and hiding. Their hearts are plunged into **shame** and insecurity and hiding and alienation from one another, and from God. We hide from God, from each other, from ourselves. We are so afraid of being naked in every sense, vulnerable, letting anyone really in, so we hide and put on a mask. But you need some people around you who you don't have to hid from, and you need a God you don't want to hide from.

But also **blame** in Genesis 3:10-13:

*"The man said, "The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

Adam blames God: "*the woman you put here with me*" (great idea). And Eve blames the serpent: "*the serpent deceived me.*" Both are no longer taking responsibility for their choices. How much hell-on-earth is caused by people not taking responsibility?

In Genesis 3:14-19 we see **pain** enter, and everything is going to start groaning as a result. We often interpret this section and the following verses as God punishing Adam and Eve because we misread the meaning of "curse". Curse is not, in this sense, of punishment but a consequence. God blessed them to be fruitful and multiply and work the ground. But outside of His kingdom, His will and way, that very blessing would be corrupted – it's all going to start groaning as a result: groaning in childbearing, groaning in gender roles,

women will make idols out of relationships and men will make idols out of power (especially in the oppression of women); groaning in the work of your hands, the production of food, the productivity of the earth – all creation will groan and die.

Tim Keller illustrates this collective groaning with a clock mechanism. The mechanism is constructed from hundreds of perfectly fashioned pieces that all work together – springs, sprockets etc. He likens humanity to a big cog in the mechanism that says “I don’t like this position in the clock, I think I’ll jump off the axel I was given and do my own thing”. And as the cog falls from its place it ends up in the mechanism, jamming the other components, which begin to grind and fail in their own task. When we step out of our place, and out from under God’s will and way in His kingdom, attempting to create our own kingdom, the result is a grinding of everything in all creation.

I don’t think I need to convince you that shame, blame and the groaning pain of lives, communities and creation is everywhere. Even the animals don’t really like us because they know we have a conflict with our creator...

**So finally, what can we do about it?** Ultimately nothing. Sin and its consequences is clinging to every part of us. It’s like a stain that won’t wash out. For all our advancement as a human race, we are still grappling with insatiable desires, confused beliefs, and destructive behaviours. We are driven by fear and pride, and along with all creation we are groaning, perhaps all the more. See, as I said up front, the gospel brings you to the very bottom. It looks like all is lost that there is nothing you can do – and you know, that’s absolutely true. But look again, because even at the very origin of sin, even in the judgement of sin, there is grace – God is leading the way out of it. We actually see five acts of grace from God to us in Genesis 3:14-24:

**(1)** God says to the serpent (which, remember, is a symbol of a kingdom of darkness, opposed to God’s image bearers), *"You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers..."* The phrase, "you will crawl and eat dust" is not an explanation of why snakes have no legs and why people hate them – but it is a sign of frustration and futility, the same frustration and futility all people who put themselves in that kingdom, usurping God, will experience. Where is the grace in that? God leaves even rebels with a nagging sense of lack. In Ecclesiastes 3:11 we read that God has *"set eternity in the human heart."*

**(2)** There will be an offspring of Eve that will be hostile to the deception of the serpent’s kingdom. This vision is pointing to a people, a nation perhaps, that would hate the sin. We see that God is already looking to Abraham.

**(3)** Through this vision God can’t help foreshadowing some time when a son of Eve will

confront this serpent's kingdom in battle: *"he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"* (Genesis 3:15). The Son of Eve will be wounded but He will crush this counter-kingdom!

**(4)** In Genesis 3:21 we read, *"The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."* Even amid the judgement, God makes the first-ever sacrifice to clothe them with the skins of an animal, foreshadowing a time when a final sacrifice would be made, by God, to not only cover over shame but to completely blot out all of our shame.

**(5)** In Genesis 3:23 we read, *"The lord banished them from the garden so they would not eat from the tree of life."* That sounds like a punishment - but what if God refuses for His image bearers to stay forever alive in their alienation from Him? So, death was to become the way back to life...! Does that not sound like someone else? Paul would say in Romans 5:15, *"for if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!"* Death comes through the first Adam - and life through Jesus Christ.

### **Everywhere I see the hopelessness of my sin I also see the hope of God's grace!**

I said there is nothing you can do about sin and I think we need that sobering reality to lead us away from ever trying to do something other than let Jesus deal with it. In CS Lewis' *Voyage of the Dawn Trader*, Eustace, the all-around annoying sibling, finds a dragon's lair and is very greedy for the treasure. He puts on a gold bracelet and falls asleep, and when he wakes up, he has been turned into a dragon.

At first Eustace thinks that being a dragon will be great, but he quickly realises that he is becoming alienated from his friends and he feels a weight of loneliness and desperately wants to no longer be a dragon.

That night, Aslan the lion comes to Eustace and leads him to a large pool. The water was so clear and Eustace thought if he could get in there it would ease the pain of being a dragon. But Aslan told him he had to undress first before he gets in:

*"Eustace found that no matter how many layers of dragon skins he managed to peel off of himself, he was still a dragon. "Then the lion said - 'You will have to let me undress you.' I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So, I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it. "The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off. Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off ... And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me - I didn't like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I'd no*

*skin on - and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm. And then I saw why. I'd turned into a boy again..."*

This powerful scene always reminds me that I cannot fix myself - there are just too many layers - that the only one who can deal with my sin-riddled heart is Jesus, the lion. Where sin abounds, God's grace abounds all the more - and that means He heals us and keeps healing us as we let Him do it - rejecting the lies of the serpent, letting His love drive out fear, and His glory eclipse our pride. All of which can be painful at times, even when it's a good pain.

And I like Lewis's note of narration at the end of this scene as well: *"It would be nice, and fairly nearly true, to say that "from that time forth Eustace was a different boy." To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun."*

Like a person who gets a knee or hip replacement knows all too well, there is the operation and then there is the rehab. The operation sets everything right but the rehab is essential to help them in their healing toward full mobility again. It is not one or the other - they are both essential parts of the healing process. The cure begins with the surgery and it goes on long after.

Another word for that ongoing work of healing and transformation into who we truly are in Christ, is: **discipleship**. We are working out this salvation, together, in partnership with the Spirit, following Jesus, increasingly reflecting His likeness:

*"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*  
(2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

*"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose."*  
(Philippians 2:12-13)

**A final thought:** In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve struggled with obeying about a tree: God said, "if you obey, you will live." In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus struggled with obeying about a tree: God said, "if you obey, you'll be killed - but they'll live." Jesus' tree of death, the cross, is our tree of life. And unlike Adam and Eve, you who are reading this have access right now to eternal life in Jesus Christ. Jesus embraced His death so you could embrace him and live. *Would you reach out today for the tree of life that Jesus offers you?*