



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“Man in His Fall, or The Nature of Sin in Man - II”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we turn again to Thee with gratitude for the ministry of Jesus Christ, and we ask again that as we study the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit may guide and direct us into the truth. May, Lord, the truth that we come to know build us up in our most holy faith. We commit all who are present to Thee, and we pray that through the ministry of the word, they too may be strengthened in the truth. And we commit to Thee the whole Church of Jesus Christ, and ask Thy blessing upon them all. Lord, we pray that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to them in the word that the entire church may be edified and brought to its maturity. We look forward to the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we pray that within Thy will, Thy wilt hasten that day. We commit this hour to Thee now.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we are continuing, and I hope concluding, our study on the nature of sin, “Man in His Fall, or the Nature of Sin in Man.” And again, let me begin by saying a few words of introduction to our study tonight. What I've been essentially saying to you in introduction has been that man is possessed at the present time of an essentially easy conscience, for he does not understand his sin. He does not understand its nature.

Christians too, are infected with this optimism, and so, therefore, not only is man outside of Christ in danger, but even Christians are in urgent peril because this vicious, irascible enemy is a mortal one and cannot be overcome if he is not known. And so it is of the greatest importance for us to recognize our enemy and not only is Satan our enemy but sin itself is our enemy.

There are two passages, one in the Old Testament and one in the New that reflect this fact about sin. After, for example, Adam had sinned in the Garden of Eden, and Cain and Abel had brought their offerings to the Lord. And you’ll remember, that when Cain brought the wrong offering in the words that God spoke to him, he said something about sin which is very much on the point of what I’m trying to say. He said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews in exhorting the listeners or readers of his letter said to them, “Consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.” Now, this is something that our Lord did, and he uses this as an illustration to show them that they have not reached that stage yet. In contrast to the true attitude to sin, that is, the recognition of it, and the leaning upon the Lord for deliverance from it, men and Christians try to cover up. We saw that in the response that Adam and Eve gave to the fact of sin in the garden when God came down to speak with them after they had fallen. Now, this itself is the work of sin; the desire to cover up. For it manifests itself, this desire to cover up, under the species of good, and so men like to appear good when really they are covering themselves from their sin. And so man, ultimately, wraps himself in the vesture of the apostles, and in the mantle of the Messiah, and pleads that he is very religious. Now that, I think, is illustrated in the New Testament in passages such as 2 Corinthians chapter 11,

verse 13 through verse 15, where the Apostle Paul speaks about the false apostles with whom he had to contend. And you remember that he called them words such as these: false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as the apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. So outwardly, they put on the cover of “servant of righteousness,” they put on the garment of “apostle,” of a “worker for Jesus Christ” even as an “apostle of Jesus Christ”. But they were false, and this will be the attitude, ultimately, that the anti-Christ will take, for he will sit himself up, call men to worship him, and act as our Lord himself. The description in the Book of Revelation of one of the beasts is that he has two horns like a lamb or rather, let me see. Is that the way that, my memory is, I don’t want to misquote that, “Had two horns like a lamb.” I knew I couldn’t misquote a text like that. [Laughter] But the point that I was trying to stress was the fact of the lamb. “Two horns, but like a lamb.” And so the tendency of sinful man is to try to cover up.

Dr. Barnhouse, in his book on Romans, comments on the fact that that great hymn “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” in some of our hymn books, had one of its stanzas changed. You’ll remember that it was originally written, “From my stricken heart with tears, two wonders I confess. The wonders of redeeming love, and my own worthlessness.” Then in some of the hymn books in the twentieth century, it was changed to, “And from my smitten heart with tears, two wonders I confess: the wonders of his glorious love, and my unworthiness.”

And then Dr. Barnhouse commented, “You’ll notice the heart is smitten instead of being stricken. Stricken is a much stronger word, because when the heart’s stricken, it’s going to die. And evidently”, he said, “It’s not smitten very hard. The love is glorious, but it is not redeeming love, for that might offend those who do not believe in atonement. And further, man’s worthlessness is changed to unworthiness.” And then Dr. Barnhouse added, “After all, they want to leave the congregation with some shreds of respectability.

And so in attempting to cover up our sin, we manifest the fact that we do not understand it. And when we do not understand it, we become its prey.”

So what is sin? What is its essential character? The Reformers have rather universally seen it as “lack of conformity to God’s law.” And I want you to turn with me to the passage upon which this definition is based. Its 1 John chapter 3 in verse 4. 1 John chapter 3, verse 4. And this is what John says, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” Well let’s see if that’s really a good definition of sin.

Now, I want to pick up our lecture from last time, and if you were carefully taking notes, you’ve noticed I’ve made a slight change in the outline, just to make it a little more harmonious, but essentially, the same thing is there. We talked last time about the philosophical theories of sin. We talked, for example, about sin as an eternal principle of evil, and we saw that that was unscriptural. That sin is sensuousness. We saw that that was unscriptural. That sin is selfishness. We saw, of course, that sin is selfishness, but that is not the essential nature of sin. There is some desire for the things that pertain to us that is not necessarily sinful. Then we then discussed sin as an illusion, and finally, sin is ignorance of God’s purposes, and we saw that none of these philosophical definitions of sin really help us to understand the essential nature of sin. Now, modern man thinks that sin is nothing more than ignorance, and if he can be educated properly, he will no longer make the mistakes that they see him making.

Well, let’s come now to the Pelegian theory of sin, because this is always involved in the question of sin, and you will notice that these Pelegian viewpoints, which I from time to time make reference to, are essentially the viewpoints of religious natural man. And they are just as modern as the twentieth century, even though Pelagius himself is to be traced back to the fifth century.

So the Pelegian theory of sin. The cornerstone of the Pelegian theory of sin is; if I ought, I can. If I ought, I can, or obligation limited by ability. Thus, man must have

ability to obey God, for God asks him to do certain things. And if he is able to do God’s “oughts,” it’s evident that he has free will to do them. So the Pelegian believes that man has free will, and that he has power in himself to do the things that God commands, because if I ought, I can. He thus can decide for or against good, and for him, sin consists in the separate acts of the will by which he decides to do that which is wrong as over against that which is right. And he has complete ability to do either one of them, and sin for him is the wrong choice. Now, you can see from this that the idea of propagation of sin by procreation is absurd. No Pelegian believes in original sin. He does not believe that we are born in sin. Now, he cannot believe that we are born in sin, because he believes we all have the inherent power to do the will of God, and consequently, we’re not born in sin.

So Pelagius denied, among other things, original sin or inherent hereditary corruption. Now, he did not accept the exposition of Ephesians 2:3 that you or I would. Paul says, “We were by nature the children of wrath.” Pelagius would not agree with that. He would say, “We are not by nature, the children of wrath. We are born with a free will and we can do God’s will or not. Now, when we make wrong decisions, then we come under the judgment of God, but we are not by nature, the children of wrath.” He denied original sin. Further, he felt that Adam’s sin only injured himself. He did not naturally think that Adam’s sin had any affect upon us, for every one of us has free will, and every one of us has the power to do the will of God. So Adam’s sin only affected himself. It did not affect us. Of course, he admitted in the controversy, that Adam set a very bad example, but nevertheless, Adam’s sin does not affect us. So all we can think of, so far as Adam’s influence upon us is concerned, is he gave us a very bad example. And unfortunately, every one of us, with the exception of Jesus Christ, has followed in his footsteps. He also naturally then, believed that man could be saved without the Gospel. Free will is full ability, so man could be saved without the Gospel.

What’s wrong with the Pelegian theory? Well first of all, man’s responsibility to God is not measured by what he can do. Unfortunately, people still have Pelegian ideas in the Christian Church. But man’s responsibility to God is not measured by what he can do. Let me show you why this is not so. All of us I believe in this room, who are Christians, would agree that, as I increase in sinful activity, I have less power to do the will of God. For you see, the more I increase in sinful activity, the more I come under the control, into the bondage of sin. The more I persist in sin, the more I am a slave to sin. Well now, if that is really true, then my ability to do good decreases, and by this theory, this growing slavery would mean a lessening responsibility. For I’m only responsible for what I can do, but if I continue in sin, I have less and less power to do the will of God. Thus, I have less and less responsibility to God. It should be obvious that this theory leads to the doctrine, the more sinful a man is, the less his obligation to God. So Pelegianism is therefore, wrong.

Furthermore, it cannot account for the universal sinfulness of man. Well, it’s nice to say Adam left us a made example, but why is it, that every man has followed example? Surely there should have been one man, or a few men, who would decide that Adam’s example was bad, and they were going to make the other decision. But the facts of experience indicate that everyone has followed in Adam’s example. Everyone has committed acts of sin. Everyone has come into slavery and into bondage to sin. So I think it should be evident to us that the will invariably chooses evil. And that would seem to run directly counter to the idea that everyone of us stands with a neutral will, and we’re faced with decisions, and we have the power to do what we are required to do. So in spite of the fact that’s good, natural man’s doctrine, it’s not biblical doctrine. As I’ve said to you more than once, Arminianism and Pelegianism and semi-Pelegianism, all of these, are religions of common sense, but they are not the religion of Saint Paul. They are not the truths of the Bible. We have to learn when we become a Christian to rethink

almost everything that we have thought as a natural man. And this is one of the things that we need to rethink.

Thirdly, in assuming that God cannot control free agents without destroying their liberty, Pelegianism negates all prayer. If it’s true that by any control of man, man’s responsibility is limited, and thus God cannot, according to Pelegian theory, control men, then what’s the use of praying? When we pray, “O God do this” or “O God do that,” what are we praying, but that he will so control men that certain things will come to pass. That’s what we say when we pray to God. We’re asking him to change according to our viewpoint. We’re asking him to change certain things, or to do certain things for us. And if it is impossible for God to move in the heart of a man, if it is impossible for him to control men, well then, why pray? It negates all prayer. It makes it simply, a mockery. Man has only himself to lean upon. So Pelegianism then, Pelegianism and its doctrine of sin is wrong. “If I ought, I can” is wrong. “If I ought, I ought”, but not, “If I ought, I can by myself”.

Let’s turn to Augustinian, the Augustinian theory. Now, Augustine was the great opponent of Pelagius. Philosophically, Augustine had some error in his doctrine. He argued that sin was negation of being, confounding physical and moral good. But when it came to the biblical side of sin, Augustine was right on the money. So far as sin as a moral doctrine was concerned, well he was biblical, and he drew his doctrine of sin from his own experiences. And if you have never read “Augustine’s Confessions” that is a book that you ought to read. That is a classic.

Now, one thing you need to learn about the classics is this; don’t read what people say about the classics. Oh, there may be some occasion when it’s worthwhile to know what so-and-so said about a classic, but why do you think a classic is a classic? Why, a classic is a classic because it is so worthwhile to read it because it’s such worthwhile reading. That’s why it’s a classic. So why bother to read people’s opinions about a classic? Read the classic. Why do you think the Bible is such a classic? Well,

because it's a great book. I'm much more interested in reading the Bible than I am what others say about it, though I read everything I can about this book. But I think that I ought to read this book, more than I read about this book.

How are you doing on your Bible reading, by the way? I finished the Bible once this year and I'm on page nine hundred and thirty-seven on my second time through this year, on this particular edition that I'm reading here. When I finish it the second time, I don't know what I'm going to do with it.

But anyway, coming back to great books. Augustine's *Confessions* is one of the great books. So read it. Get it and read it. You can buy it for a dollar, a dollar and a half. And Augustine, he had some erroneous ideas. He believed that the salvation that God gives to men comes through the experience of water baptism and that was wrong. He really believed in some other things that were wrong. He wasn't a pre-millennialist. As a matter of fact, he was really the first amillennialists. And so there are certain things about Augustine that are not good, but when it came to his own Christian experience, and you must remember, he didn't have the benefit of the great Bible teachers of the twentieth century. He never heard me. [Laughter] Now, I was just kidding you then. Somebody came up to me some weeks back when I said something like that, and they thought I meant those things that I was saying. I really didn't. It's just to keep you awake. But Augustine does have many things that are not scriptural, but he did have a tremendous experience, and he had a great influence on us.

Well, these are the things that he believed about sin, and these arose out of his experience. First of all, he knew himself guilty and polluted. Second, his sin he knew touched not only his acts but his emotions. He saw that. Third, he knew that he had always been a sinner. He recognized, when he realized that he was a sinner, that this was the way he had always been. Fourth, he knew he had no power to change his nature. He had no liberty of ability, as the Pelegians pointed out. He knew that this sin, which he had always had, this sin that touched his whole life, was something that he

could not extricate himself from. Fifth, his very consciousness of evil and guilt showed that sin was not necessary, but must be voluntary. In other words, if it were something that was necessary to men, he wouldn’t feel guilty about it. But the fact that he felt guilty about it was evidence that it was not a necessary thing in men. Necessary since the Fall, but not necessary to human nature. He felt guilty about it, and he knew that came from without himself. If man is supposed to be a sinner from the beginning, we wouldn’t feel guilty if we sinned. That’s what we’re supposed to do. And sixth, what he saw in himself, he saw in others. He looked around and he said, “When men, even though they don’t realize it, when I see these men, well, they’re having the same experience that I had. All show themselves to be sinners.”

And so Augustine concluded what you should conclude. He concluded first; men cannot be saved by their own merit. They don’t have any merit. Second, he concluded that efficacious grace must come by the Holy Spirit, for there is no way for it to arise in him. He was bound up in his sin. And third, he concluded that salvation is of grace, dependent not upon the will of man, for he saw his will as enslaved to sin, but upon God’s good pleasure. He saw that God had come to him in his good pleasure, in his good will, and had brought Augustine to him. Election then, Augustine saw, was founded, not upon the foresight of God that certain men would believe, but election was founded, Augustine taught and saw, upon the foreordination of God that those who were elect were those whom God had foreordained to bring to himself. And finally, he concluded, that the perseverance of the saints was a logical doctrine from this because it is evident that God, if God came to men when they were sinners and brought them to himself, well surely, once they had been brought to him out of their state of enmity as aliens, why, he will keep them now that they have come to love him.

So the Augustinian theory of sin was essentially a biblical theory, but he did not identify it specifically enough for us, and so we want to move on from Augustine. I’m not going to say anything tonight about the Roman Catholic theory of sin. The reason I’m not

is this; it is rather complicated, and furthermore, the Roman Catholics themselves have never been completely agreed on the essential character of sin. Some of them have been semi-Pelegian, some have been Pelegian, some have been Augustinian, like Augustine who was and probably we should recognize him as a Catholic.

Let’s move on to the semi-Pelegians. The leaders of semi-Pelegianism were men who arose in the fifth and sixth century as a result of the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius. On the one hand is Pelagius, “If I ought, I can.” He’s the religion of the natural man; the man who believes that by good works, he can come to God. On the other hand, well, here is Augustine. He is the man who believes in the sovereign election of God, and you know that there are going to be some people who want to try to get in the middle between these two extremes. That is, one that believes that salvation is by works, essentially, another that believes that salvation is by the foreordination, the election of God ultimately worked out so that everything comes from God. And it’s only natural that we should have some people who try to find that middle ground.

Now, the semi-Pelegians taught that man must begin, in his free will, to seek God. And when he begins in his free will to seek God, then God will aid him and so man cooperates with God’s grace in both salvation and sanctification. The Augustinians taught rightly, that the disposition to seek God is the work of God’s grace. The semi-Pelegians taught that the disposition to seek God is the work of man, but when man did decide to seek God, to really get to God, he needed God’s help. And so God came with his grace and the semi-Pelegians believe that men cooperated with God’s grace once the human will had turned toward the Lord, and as a result of the human will turning, God’s grace then brought the man to the Lord. That is really the viewpoint of almost all evangelists that preach today. And if you’ll listen carefully, you’ll discover in their preaching that, that is essentially the kind of gospel they present. That the work of salvation begins with us, and God will help us if we begin. That’s semi-Pelegianism. That’s one of the heresies of the Christian Church. That’s why I talk about it so much. Nobody ever does, and I

believe that we should understand grace as pure grace. Well you can see then, that the doctrine of the semi-Pelegians, with regard to sin, is not a pure doctrine, for they see that man is essentially, not totally a sinner. He can turn to God in his own will.

Well, let’s move on to the Protestant theory of sin. We could call this the biblical theory, but I want to try to refine it slightly, and so we’ll call it the Protestant theory of sin. Now this essentially, the theory of the Presbyterians. It’s the theory of the Anglicans. It’s the theory of good Baptists. Baptists differ among themselves a little bit. It’s the theory of good Wesleyans, although the Wesleyans were not quite as biblical as I would like to have had them be. Now, the great thing that the Protestants did was, they did not attempt to found their doctrine of the nature of sin on philosophy. What they first of all decided that one should do, is to go to the word of God. If we’re going to discover the nature of sin, we should go to the word of God. And so they went to the word of God, and these are the ideas which they came up with.

They first of all decided that sin was lack of conformity to God’s law, but it involved each one of these things that I’ve listed here; the seven things, with the exception of number six. There was some question about that, and I will talk about that. But anyway, they felt that this sin is lawlessness involved, first; sin is a specific kind of evil. Now when they said sin was a specific kind of evil, they were trying to distinguish truth from error. And what they meant by that was this; sin is not physical evil, like a calamity. That may be an effect of sin, but that is not sin. So sin is not a calamity. Sin is moral evil. It is a specific kind of evil. Furthermore, no man can really understand sin, who does not understand his own sin. They taught that men were like blind men. Blind men cannot really understand light if they have never seen it, but if they have seen light, then they’re able to understand it. And so consequently, no one can understand sin who has not known moral evil. But it is a specific kind of evil, moral evil.

Second, sin is an absolute, they taught. It is not a lesser goodness. Sin is evil. We cannot speak of degrees in sin. It is, now I should qualify that. We can speak of

degrees within sin, but we cannot speak of something as lesser evil in its essential character. In other words, something is either sin or it is not sin, though there may be degrees within the sin. So it was an absolute. It is the kind of thing that we read in the Bible when, for example, we read, “If we break one aspect of the law, we are guilty of all.” James says in chapter 2 verse 10, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.” And so to stumble in one point, means that a person is a sinner. It is an absolute. Now, that is important for modern views concerning sin, because there are many today who do not believe that sin is an absolute. As a matter of fact, there are many people who do not believe there is any absolute that we can be sure of.

Third, they taught that sin was transgression of God’s law. Now, our text is 1 John 3:4. And there we read, “Sin is lawlessness.” This loomed large in the Protestant thinking. “Sin is lawlessness.” Sin is transgression of God’s law. It is not transgression of human reason. It’s not transgression of the moral order of the universe, as we might understand it philosophically. It’s not transgression of the law of happiness. Sin is transgression of God’s law. It is transgression of God’s word. Sin is not transgression of the laws of celibacy, or the laws of poverty, church laws. Sin is transgression of God’s law. This was the thing that they taught.

Furthermore, they taught that it was necessary for man to give perfect obedience to that law. Now, you may turn with me, if you will, to Matthew chapter 22, verse 37 through verse 40. And here, we have the incident in which our Lord is questioned concerning the greatest commandment. Matthew chapter 22 in verse 36, “The lawyer came to him and he said; Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And he said to him; You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Now notice those little “all’s”. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.” Not ninety-five percent obedience in the

heart and five percent disobedience. "All your heart, all your soul, all your mind." In other words, the requirement that Jesus lays upon us, God would, is to love God perfectly. That is one hundred percent obedience that is demanded by God. So all lack of complete obedience to God is sin. Furthermore, it is to both tables of the law. Not only love toward God, but love toward man. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." These are two statements from the law that Jesus picked out in order to summarize the Ten Commandments, the first table of which were directed toward God first. Men are to love God first, and then they are to love men. This is the outgrowth of it. The second commandment is the summary of the last four of these Commandments, and our Lord in – by his marvelous understanding of the Scriptures, picks these two statements out as the summary of all of our responsibility to God. We have complete and total responsibility to God. We have complete and total responsibility to our fellow men. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. So all lack of complete congeniality with God, all lack of complete congeniality with men, is sin.

Is there anyone in the audience who would like to stand up and say, "Well, I have loved the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul?" And would like to add, "I've also loved my neighbor as myself"? Well, if you cannot say that, you're a sinner. You have broken God's law. So all lack of complete congeniality with God and his holiness, whether deliberate or inherited, for remember, God's law covers not only those deliberate sins that we commit when we have become workers of iniquity. Jesus said, remember, "Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity," lawlessness, same Greek word is found in 1 John 3:4. But Paul says, "We were by nature, the children of wrath." So you see, even in our inherited sin, we are under the judgment of God. We are by nature, the children of wrath. Not by act only, but by nature, the children of wrath. So all lack of complete congeniality with God and man, whether deliberate or inherited, whether arising from commission of sin or omission of sin, for it is not only what we have done that makes us guilty, but what we have not done that makes us

guilty. It would be possible to conceive philosophically, of a person who lives as a zero. Well, he too would be a sinner, for you see, he is not only required not to break the laws of God in the negative sense, but he is required not to break the laws in the positive sense to present God with a perfect obedience. And so, to read it through again, all lack of complete congeniality with God, whether deliberate or inherited, whether towards man or God, whether arising from commission or omission is sin. Sin is the transgression of the law. The law of God is found in his word. Sin is transgression of the word of God.

Further, the Protestants said, “Sin does not consist only in overt acts.” Let’s turn to a passage like Matthew chapter 5, verse 28. As you know, the Bible teaches that we have a sinful state, and on the basis of our sinful state of heart, we have sinful habits. And these sinful habits manifest themselves in sinful deeds. And our Lord put his finger on some of them when he said, “But I say to you that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her,” that’s within the heart, “has committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

The Roman Catholics taught that concupiscence, or lust was not sin until it had conceived. Then it brought forth sin. As you can see, that’s based on a misinterpretation of James chapter 1 in verse 15. James did not mean that concupiscence is not sin until it has brought forth or conceived, only then does it become sin. He meant, only then does it become and act of sin, but it was sin from the beginning. Paul said, “I have not known coveting or sin, except the law said; thou shall not covet.” That’s in the heart. That’s when he discovered his sin, long before in manifested itself in an act. So concupiscence or lust is sin. So sin does not consist only in overt acts, but it consists in that sinful state which we possess by birth, the sinful habits which we have cultivated over all of the years of our lives, and the sinful acts that manifest themselves. And if our acts do not show our habits, and our state, we’re still guilty because of the latter anyway.

Fifth, the Protestants taught that sin had its seat in man’s volitional nature, or to use the biblical term, sin has its seat in man’s heart. I put on the board, Luke chapter 6,

verse 45. Here we read these words, 6:45. “The good man, out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good, and the evil man, out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil, for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.” So sin has its seat in man’s volitional nature or in his heart.

Sixth, and this is the thing that I want to stress, sin’s basic root is unbelief. I lay awake the other night thinking about 1 John 3:4. “Sin is lawlessness.” And yet at the same time, I was comparing that in my mind, as I lay upon my bed, with the statements in the word of God such as John chapter 16 when Jesus speaks about the fact that the Holy Spirit is going to come and he’s going to convict men of sin because they believe not in me. And as you know, as you read through the Gospel of John, John over and over again implies that the root of sin is unbelief. It’s not so much what a man does outwardly, as his attitude of mind toward the truth of God. And I just, as I lay awake, I don’t know how long I lay awake. Sometimes those things put me to sleep rather early, but at other times they don’t. Well, I puzzled over that for a long time. I even kept Mary awake for awhile, asking her questions. It’s terrible, you know, to have a husband like that, asking you theological questions when you want to get to sleep. And it’s late anyway, because I keep her up after twelve almost every night. But still, we’d discuss these things, and I know it’s a pain in the neck to have a husband like that, but they begin to bother me, and so I wrestle with them on my bed and go to sleep. I’m sure if she were up here giving you a lecture, she would point out how quickly I go to sleep, and how my snoring bothers her more than my questions do. As I thought about this the other night, I realized that the only way in which I can really put these together is to say that the fruit is lack of conformity to the law. That’s what we see. But the subjective root of our sin is our lack of trust, our unbelief. Now, it’s often said, and you will occasionally hear Bible teachers say this. This is criticize Bible teachers night. You will often hear them say that sin is pride. And as a matter of fact, you will find them occasionally pointing to texts of Scripture like Titus, like 1 Timothy chapter 3 in verse 6 where Paul

says concerning Satan, “And not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.” And so Satan came into the condemnation of pride, and pride was one of the motives that led Eve to her sin. She saw that the tree was desirable to make her wise. Pride. But I’d like to submit to you, that the reason that men have pride is because they have already manifested unbelief. That really, unbelief in their mind is the root of the effect of pride. Now it’s true; pride is a sin. And Adam and Eve fell into pride. So did Satan, but that was the result of their basic lack of trust in God’s word. If Eve had really believed the word of God and trusted in it when Satan came with these promises to her, these testings, she would have said, “That’s contrary to the word of God. I just won’t accept it.” But you see, because she failed in her trust in the word, she turned to those promises, and began to be filled with pride. And likewise Satan, because he finally said, “I will be like the Most High.” If he had realized, I mean, if he had responded to what he knew that he was a creature of God and had believed what had been taught him by God, he would not have fallen. So pride presupposes unbelief; rejection of one’s relation to God. And all other sins flow from unbelief. Belief in the mind precedes action by the will. The reason that I do certain things is because I think certain ways in my basic inmost disposition. Now, we call that speaking of the will, as the inclination of the will, or my basic center of knowledge. What I know.

Temptation, as you look at Genesis chapter 3, the temptation was aimed, it seems to me, at unbelief, by the creature. For Satan came to Eve and he said to her this, “Yea, has God said ye shall not eat from any tree of the Garden?” In other words, the basic thrust of the initial part of the testing is directed toward believing the word of God. So it appears from this, that unbelief is the root of all sin.

The initial error then, of Eve, was an error in her understanding, in which she turned away from her understanding of the word of God, to the word of Satan. So that essentially, the root of all sin is unbelief. The order then is unbelief, which leads to rebellion, which may manifest itself, (I put in parentheses, autonomy of any kind, pride,

whatever it may be) and that leads to immorality. As I have often indicated on the blackboard, I guess for you when we use the blackboard, we begin something like this: unbelief, which leads to, well what I have here is unbelief leads to rebellion. This is the desire for autonomy. Independence. Pride, for example. And that in turn, leads to immorality. Acts of sin. This is the psychology of sin. Unbelief, rebellion, immorality.

Now, when the Bible says, “Sin is lawlessness,” it is looking at not only at these acts of sin but also autonomy and pride. For remember, that sin touches the inner man as well as the outer man, but unbelief is the root of it all. So when we say, “What is the nature of human sin,” we answer that by saying, “Sin is unbelief, which manifests itself in rebellion, which in turn issues in immorality.” This is the biblical psychology of sin. That is why we call upon men to believe the word of God. We’re calling upon them to reverse their acts and attitude of sin.

One of the men that I love is Martin Luther. He was almost a Calvinist. Almost. Luther’s so close to being completely sound. And Luther was a great man, and here again, everybody ought to read some Martin Luther. Everybody ought to know something about that man. When I get to heaven, he’s one of the men that I want to spend a great deal of time with. Luther had some interesting comments to say about sin. He’s the only man that I’ve found who’s as clear as I am on this point. [Laughter] Now, it’s very little print here, so I’m using my glasses. And believe it or not what I’m reading from is from Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, but he too was a lover of Luther. And he has some interesting quotations from him. He says, “That unbelief, and particularly that unbelief, and particularly unbelief in Jesus Christ is the sin; is in the New Testament, a specific kind of Johannine witness. He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him.” Sin is rejecting Jesus Christ. “He that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Sin is unbelief in the Son. “He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent him.” Sin is to not honor Jesus Christ. “Believe him”, the other texts show. “He that

believeth not the Son, shall not see life.” Believe the Son. “He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.” Again, sin traced to unbelief. And then he quotes the text which I have often used, “And the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin because they believe not on me.”

Now, Luther went on to say this, “The result of unbelief is that we do not know God and, therefore, fear him. And when we fear him, we hate him, and blaspheme him, and commit all kinds of sins, and we do not keep any of his commandments.” He said again, “We cannot do any greater despite to our Lord God than by unbelief, for by it, we make God a devil. Again, we cannot do him any greater honor than by faith when we regard him as Savior. Therefore, we cannot abide a doubting heart, like the Turk who doubts, or the monk, who in despair runs to a monastery and says; O, how hot is hell. I will therefore do good works to placate God. But by good works, we do not become a Christian, but remain a heathen.” Now, he expresses himself very definitely here when he says, “Unbelief is the chief sin and the source of all other sins.” I read that after I tossed and turned on my bed the other night. I guess the Holy Spirit was saying, “Go to Luther. Go to Luther. Listen to what he has to say.” The chief sin is the source of all the other sins. The chief sin of which the Holy Ghost tells us, is one of which the whole world is guilty, or he could not convict the world of it. And this sin, is not to believe in Jesus Christ. So sin is unbelief. That’s why Jesus said, “When the Holy Spirit is come, he will convict the world of sin, of righteousness and judgment. Of sin because they believe not on me.”

Now, what about the Old Testament? Well, they didn’t have Jesus Christ to believe on, in the full sense but still, sin was unbelief in God. And unbelief in that measure that the divine revelation had taken at the particular point a person came into existence. He was responsible to believe the message of God at that point. When John the Baptist was here, men were responsible to believe John the Baptist for he gave the word of God. When our Lord came, and the full revelation of God has come, we are

responsible to believe in him. And that’s the essence of sin; to disbelieve the word of God.

Professor Bruner has said, “Sin is disobedience to God, and is due to distrust.” And he too, has hit the nail on the head. It’s due to distrust. So it is distrust that leads to disobedience. Now, if someone should say to you, “What is sin?” Don’t say, “Sin is lawlessness” only. Lawlessness is sin, and sin is lawlessness, but sin is the lawlessness of unbelief. That’s the essential character of sin. That is why, in the gospel message, we call upon men to believe the message of God. That’s why, to call upon men to believe, is what we ought to say. And we ought to avoid saying other things that tend to turn men away from the issue which is, to believe the word of God. That’s why I don’t like other terms for salvation. I like the biblical term. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved because sin is unbelief.

Sin includes guilt and pollution. In a sense, these are the results of sin, but since they go invariably with sin, I think it’s fair to include this in our exposition of what is sin. In relation to God’s justice, man is therefore guilty because of his unbelief. In relation to his holiness, he is polluted. So he has two things that are wrong with him as a result of his sin. He has the guilt of blameworthiness, and he has the guilt of punishment. He is liable to demerit because he’s blameworthy, and he’s liable to punishment because he’s broken specific laws of God. Jesus Christ came, by the way, not to take away our demerit, not to take away our blameworthiness. He came to take away our penalty, our liability to judgment. Now, that’s why even though Jesus Christ is come, and we have believed in him, we’re still sinners. We’re still blameworthy. We are still full of demerit. Our liability to God’s law has been taken away, but we are still the same old sorry people that we were before. That’s why James calls us sinners in his book, James chapter 4 in verse 8. He calls us sinners. So before God, we are still sinners, blameworthy, but our guilt, our liability to punishment, that aspect of our guilt has been taken away. Jesus Christ has done that.

All right, to summarize then. Sin is unbelief, which leads to rebellion, issues and lack of conformity to the moral law of a loving God. That’s what makes it so bad. In that same epistle, which says that sin is lawlessness, we read that “God is love” and we read that “God is light.” So sin is unbelief, which leads to rebellion and issues and the lack of conformity to the moral law of a loving but holy God, either in act, disposition, or state. Let me read it again. It’s my definition. Sin is unbelief, which leads to rebellion and issues in lack of conformity to the moral law of a loving but holy God, either in act, disposition, or state. It is the supreme irony of human existence.

Isn’t it a strange thing? We live in an age in which there is great motivation to unite. We have desire to unite in our country. We have desire to unite among the countries of the world. We have desire to unite in the church. We have desire to unite, even in some of the heathen, atheistic philosophies of the earth, such as in Communism; the desire to unite. Workers of the world unite. That’s the way it all began. And isn’t it a striking thing that the one thing in which men are united, is their sin? And the fact that we are united in this one thing is the one thing that keeps us from forever uniting. That’s why Marx couldn’t get along with Bakunin. That’s why Stalin couldn’t get along with Trotsky. That’s why Khrushchev couldn’t get along with his friends. That’s why, the other day in the Politburo, they had a little scrap; Brezhnev and some of the others. That’s why Mao cannot get along with the Russians. That’s why they neither can get along with Hanoi at the present time, because they’re all sinners, and all interested in their own affairs, which arises out essentially of their unbelief and their rebellion against God. Isn’t it interesting? Striking.

Now, I was going to give you a third point, but it’s not necessary. My third point was going to be a quick tracing of the Hebrew and Greek words for sin, and to point out how the words themselves, stress this fact. But both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, the words for sin, if some of you are interested in copying down after we have a word of prayer, why I will leave them here for you to copy. That’s a little sideways, but

that’s the only way it will stay on this thing on the spur of the moment. Both the Old Testament words and the New Testament words stress essentially, the same thing. Some of these terms say that sin is “to miss the mark”. Some of these terms say that sin is “to go aside from the right way”. Some of these terms teach that sin is “to rebel”. Some of these say that sin is “to go astray”. But in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament, the most common word for sin means “to miss the mark; to fail”. And that is precisely what we have been saying; that by sin, men have failed to do the word of God. You might think that sin is only negative, that, therefore, the trouble with man is simply, that he’s a slightly inferior marksman, that league he ought to be. But when you put all of these words together, particularly those that deal with rebellion, you discover that the sinner is not only an inefficient marksman, he’s a deliberately perverse marksman. He deliberately, instead of aiming at the target, chooses another target contrary to the target, aims for that, and usually hits it. So sin is not a slight deviation from the mainline of development, which is leading straight up to the kingdom of God, as our liberal friends would tell us, but it is the mainline of development and it leads in exactly the opposite direction. It is unbelief, which issues in rebellion, leads to acts of sin, which ultimately brings men to hell. That’s sin.

Next time, we want to talk about total depravity. What does it mean? Original sin. Great doctrines of the word of God. Important for you to know. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful for the teaching of the word of God. O Lord, deliver us from unbelief. Help us to read the word in faith, and may the power of the Holy Spirit so undergird us, that by Thy grace and Thy grace only, we may please Thee in obedience. We know, Lord, it is impossible to please God without faith. For Thou art a rewarder to those that diligently seek Thee. Give us that motivation and power for Jesus’ glory. Amen.

In his name. Amen.