

Gospel of Matthew

18:5-9

The Serious Matter of Sin!



The culture has a problem with sin. The word itself seems judgmental, pejorative to them. Since the culture no longer adheres to Judeo-Christian values, or actually, to absolutes of any kind, the word “sin” has fallen out of favor with the population. In correlation with the word’s disuse, people have become hesitant to exercise any kind of negative judgment on almost any form of excessive, outrageous, or self-destructive human behavior. Many people are even involved in re-defining sin, morality, ethics. The worst sin is to hurt the planet, or disapprove of the sexual proclivities of certain people groups.



*I remember watching a You Tube video of a debate between a young and enlightened atheist and a Christian. The atheist asked “Why are you so afraid of subjective moral reasoning” – why are you afraid of us humans figuring out what is right and wrong on our own without the absolutes of some holy book telling us what to do or not do? The atheist didn’t think there was anything to fear from people. The Christian answered him by first asking a question. “*Sir, do you lock your doors at night?*” He did! The Christian went on to explain to this atheist, a college student, that experimentation with moral reasoning had cost the lives of well over 100 million people in just the last century – more than all of the previous centuries since the birth of civilization! The Christian argued quite convincingly, even conclusively, that the Godless fascism of Hitler’s Germany, and the Communist Marxism of the Leninist/Stalinist Soviet Union **AND** the Maoist revolution of China proves that when you leave the concept of the moral absolutes - of moral right and wrong up to people to define, you get the terrifying nightmare of holocaust! The man who asked the question and who had appeared so enlightened just a few short moments before was held speechless as his ignorance of 20th century history was exposed in all its bloody darkness, and its obvious correlation to basic human nature – and how atheism proves in recent history to unleash the beast in humanity!

Listen, sin **IS** a big deal! It began with the first man and woman disconnecting themselves from God by trying to take over for Him. They were persuaded by Satan that their lives were their own and they had the right to live without the the



authority and influence of their Creator in their lives whatsoever! The definitive letter in word “sin” is the letter “i”! Sin is the result of people thinking it is all about them. It is self-centeredness – me, me, me! We become so self-absorbed that we give ourselves permission to do wrong - to ourselves and to others.

By “**do wrong to *ourselves***” I mean that we wreck our bodies with over-indulgence and addictions, and gluttony. We ruin our minds with selfish ideals, false ideas (creating highly defective truth grids that sift out truth and accept falsehoods), by elevating temporary vanities to be our greatest loves - our looks, our muscles, our things, our style, our status. And then then we accept as our own, selfish and shallow (but ironically) self-***destructive*** values – win at all costs, be the best, own the best, etc. `

When I say we **do wrong to *others*** I mean that we can be suspicious, mean-spirited, cruelly competitive, impatient, looking for ways to do someone harm/cause them damage. We can be without empathy/mercy regarding someone else’s pain or loss, stingy, envious and resentful. We will lie/deceive, participate in malicious gossip, we can enjoy keeping discord going, we can be unfaithful and even traitorous, we can betray a confidence, pilfer and steal, cheat, lust, revel in filth, vulgarity, and vice, and all the variations of these sins that do evil to others.



Middle-earth, says Webster's unabridged dictionary is "*the world, considered as lying between heaven and hell*". I like the term because it brings perspective. Most people in the west now view the earth as a tiny planet off to one side, lost in the vastness of the Milky Way galaxy, which in turn is lost in the unfathomable vastness of a meaningless universe. But the term "middle-earth" brings to mind an important dynamic to the existence of the planet - that there is another realm of

existence, maybe two – the realm where heaven exists and that realm where hell exists. Earth, exists in the middle, suspended between heaven and hell.

The people on "middle-earth" are separated into two basic categories. Those that are IN the Kingdom of God/Heaven where God is welcome to rule, and those that are NOT, where God is NOT welcome to rule! Those that are not IN the Kingdom of God are IN another kingdom – the Kingdom of Darkness/Hell – the antithesis and enemy of God's Kingdom. Another name for the Kingdom of Hell is "the world". "The world" is a system of thought and behavior adopted by the vast majority of people that is based on sin. "The world" consists of people that do not seek God, who want all His benefits without acknowledging Him. These are the people that do not want what they would consider God's interference in their lives. Bottom line is that they do not want anyone, not even God, telling them what to do or not do. If they want to do wrong and get away with it, they will! This is just original sin being repeated over and over again. God gave the first man and woman ONE thing that they were not to do – just one! "*Just don't eat the fruit from that one tree in the middle of Eden. I you do, you will die!*" And they would not even abide by that one thing!

Most people on middle-earth will not accept the Creator/God telling them what to do, and they either deny the existence of heaven and hell, or hope against hope that God and the afterlife are not real because they know where they *deserve* to go



But those *in* the kingdom of Heaven *want to* believe and obey Him! They have placed their faith in the Savior, Jesus Christ, and are redeemed by God, bought as His own possession through the blood of God's Son bled out while He was upon the cross. The blood of Christ was the price to wipe out the debt that people owe the penal system of God for their independence from Him and the sins that spring from that independence. These fortunate people who have believed God and trusted Him, and who have requested of God that the work of Christ on the cross be applied as payment for *their* sins, have the guilt of their sins eradicated. Then they get to know the joy of real and authentic love in this life, and their souls are destined for the realm of Heaven when they die!

On the opposite side of the spectrum, those outside the Kingdom of God/Heaven (most of humanity) do not believe God, do not trust Him, and do not care to obey Him - unless it coincides with what they want to do anyway. Life for them is about what THEY want, not what God wants.

But the behaviors, attitudes, belief systems and mind set of these two realms are polar opposite, and they also have two polar-opposite results. The Law of Cause and Effect applies to both.

There are *benefits* to **obeying** Creator/God and *consequences* to **disobeying** Him! That is the way that it works. It is a natural *and* spiritual law as demonstrably real as the physical law of gravity can be shown to be real by dropping something. For instance, when one or the other or both spouses in a marriage say cruel things to each other – as surely as the sun rises and sets every day, that marriage has suffered a loss of its love and respect. It is a law – cause and effect. If a person consistently speaks words of love and encouragement, that marriage reaps love and respect. God has spoken to us in His word and told us to say and do loving things to each other. It is His express will that we do this to all people, but especially to our spouses. The Bible focuses on spousal relationships because it is especially important to Creator/God! In telling us how to live well, God has to tell us what NOT to do – the mistakes to NOT make! He does not tell us this to abuse us, to wrap chains around us, but to free us of those sins that erode and destroy the goodness of life! He tells us what to do and not do because He is showing us His love.



So in our text, Jesus is dividing those on middle earth into two categories. There are real consequences and real rewards – not just during our brief time on earth but *after* our time here! If you invite and welcome people into the Kingdom of God, it is as if you have shown love to Christ Himself! That is how to live and use your time and resources. That pleases God and has real intrinsic value! It makes our lives be well-lived! This is what people in God's Kingdom do. We invite others to join us in following Jesus! It is His idea to bring in as many as will cross over into His Kingdom. He will take them from the Kingdom of Darkness to save them *from* themselves and a bring them into His Kingdom to save them *to* Himself! Once there, people can be included in His Love with wonderful benefits in this life and wildly better ones in the next! God LOVES doing that, and the followers of Jesus love being assigned to work for God in assisting Him in that task! We love the assignment because the love of God for people thrives in our hearts! Helping God save them and bring them to Himself is GOLD!



But the bulk of this text is a dire warning! Sin is as serious as snakebite! But what if a person is in the Kingdom and someone is tempting them and involving them in sin?! The sin of **gossip** immediately comes to mind where someone starts speaking a juicy bit of knowledge about someone to someone that has nothing to do with helping to solve the problem. Or someone tries to get someone on their side who has nothing to do with a dispute! Enlisting someone unrelated to a dispute to join your dispute is most often causing them to sin! That is a big deal! But it could also be **sexual sin**. Such things inevitably happen all the time in churches all over the world! It has happened here a few times. It's been a long time now, and I hope to never see it again,.. but human nature being what it is, I'm not holding my breath. Where there are men and women together, someone draws someone else in to sexual sin. But Jesus says it will go bad for that person who causes the thing! I just don't get that one! Trading eternity for illicit sex! It is a very bad tradeoff and you have to be out of your mind to go there!



Or spreading **false beliefs** – departing from the teaching of Jesus and His apostles. Many in the evangelical church are playing fast and loose with the scriptures – writing books to persuade Christians that Hell may not be eternal – explaining away verse after verse on the subject. And they are doing the same with scriptural prohibitions of sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman – explaining that it doesn't really mean what it says, or that God is a God of love, and love is “diverse” and “inclusive”! I mean, the ingenuity and energy of these so-called Christians is really diabolical! They are so good at persuading the weak-willed and those less-grounded in the scriptures! But “*woe*” to those who are doing this and weakening the resolve of other Christians to remain strong in the faith and true to the scriptures and to God Himself! Woe to those that tempt and deceive and cause other Christians to fall. They are doing the work of Satan and they will live to regret it, and the consequences only get worse for them when the wretched person dies! “*Woe to the man*” – your future is cursed by God! It looks really, really, bad for you – filled with “WOE”!



It would have been better, Jesus indicates, if such a person would have died even a terrible death first, like being executed by drowning, before leading others astray! You don't want to leave middle earth having drawn others into your sin! Is it forgivable? Yes, but in my experience, self-centered people rarely look inside deep enough to see their own ugliness and gross depravity. They will try to worm their way out of their guilt all the way to the judgment throne of God. There, He will silence their excuses and self-justifications!