

Who cares about sin?

Rev. John Belden

With all I have written lately about sin, you must be thinking that nothing more could be said. Yet the most important thing about sin has not been said. I've touched on it. But it's far too important to merely touch on.

Many Christians have the notion that sin is merely a horizontal issue. They don't picture God as being personally offended by it. If anything, they believe He is grieved because of the heartache and pain sin brings into our lives. He doesn't like it simply because it hinders our happiness and fulfillment. There is some truth in this. But such narrow thinking misses the main problem with sin.

Let me illustrate this for you married men. Imagine you found out that your wife had been unfaithful to you. Would you be personally offended? Or would you say something like, "Honey, I'm not at all upset; I'm just concerned that you won't be truly fulfilled running around like this. Your adultery has nothing to do with me. It's just that I am concerned about your happiness." Men, wouldn't you take this sin personally? Wouldn't you be jealous? You should be.

God gets jealous: "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5). God wants His people to be faithful to Him. Unfaithfulness offends Him. In Ezekiel 6:9, God said to those who were unfaithful, "I was crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from Me." Furthermore, the whole story of Hosea's unfaithful wife is an illustration of God's response to His unfaithful people.

The most important thing we need to know about sin is that it is primarily against God. When David confessed his sin with Bathsheba, he said to God, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight" (Psalm 51:4). Wait a minute. David sinned against Uriah, right? Yes, but he knew that all sin is primarily against God.

Remember what Joseph said when he was approached by Potiphar's wife: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). Joseph's primary concern was offending God, not Potiphar. He had a God-centered theology of sin.

Sin isn't primarily a social concept. It's a theological concept. It's not merely horizontal (between you and another person). It's vertical (between you and God). Guilt is not just a feeling we have when we know we have done something wrong. Guilt is a real state grounded in a record of past sins. It's like a rap sheet. It's a legal record against us. God takes it personally. He's storing up wrath for us "in the day of wrath" (Rom. 2:5). This is the day when "God will judge the secrets of men" (v.16).

Don't be misled into thinking that just because you have shame about things you have done, you really have true conviction of sin. Everyone experiences shame. The Holy Spirit's work of conviction is much deeper. He produces a profound sense that your sin has offended a holy and good God.

Don't think because you are merely sorry for your sin that you have godly sorrow. Godly sorrow, which is centered on God, always "produces repentance leading to salvation" (II Corinthians 7:10). But "the sorrow of the world"-merely being sorry about the consequences, embarrassment, and pain you've brought to yourself and others-"produces death" (v.10).

We all know we have not lived up to our own standard of what is right. Admitting this is not the same as being convicted of sin. I meet people all the time who hit rock bottom and yet have a false kind of sorrow and shame. They hate the consequences of their sin, but they really don't hate the sin that caused the consequences. Very few are "made sorry in a godly manner" (I Cor. 7:9).

True conviction comes only from God. This kind of conviction makes you hate the sin as well as its consequences. And the primary reason you hate it is because it is offensive to a holy and loving God.

Who cares about sin? A holy God does. Shouldn't you care about your sin against such a God?

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