

Preached 3rd time at GBC 09-05-2015 (with minor differences and different applications)

Original Sin and Some Implications for the Local Church

This morning as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper, we remember our Lord Jesus. We remember his death. We remember that he bore our sins, taking the wrath of God upon himself in our place. We remember his words: "***This is my body broken for you.***" And as Christians, we know that all our sins are forgiven. However, as we live in this world, sin remains. Though we are a new creation in Christ, and our position is eternally secure in him, we still find ourselves struggling and fighting against sin. (Do you fight with sin?) The effects of original sin remain. We are still sinners! All of us identify with the words of Paul in Rom. 7:22:23: "**For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.²⁴ Wretched man that I am!**" This is the ongoing fight against sin until we are delivered either by death or when our Lord returns.

Today, I would like to consider some implications of original sin for us as a church. More specifically, how can the doctrine of original sin help us as we try and live together in this local body called GBC? These truths are not original to me. They come from a chapter in a book by Kevin DeYoung called *Why We Love the Church*. And, if you are thinking, I've heard this before, you are right. This is the 3rd time I've preached some version of this sermon. But, I think we need to hear it again! And hopefully, these truths will help us as we take the Lord's Supper together this morning. I will share 5 truths.

1. The doctrine of original sin helps us understand the church's imperfections. This includes past, present, and future imperfections. Think about this: The church is filled with lost sinners, those whose hearts are turned against God. The church is also filled with saved sinners, and with both of these groups, the church in general is filled with so many millions of people from different backgrounds and places in life. All of us are different, and our sins manifest themselves in almost infinite ways. It is not surprising that the church has a truckload of issues to deal with. Churches have pew after pew (or chair after chair) of selfish, proud, petty, lustful, greedy people. That's us! In every true church many of the people are trying to put to death the deeds of the flesh, but it is slow, hard, and many times inconsistent. Other church members are simply unregenerate, sitting in church a couple times a month out of custom or obligation. With such a mix of sinners, it is no wonder that things often times look depressing.

In my more than 25 years of being a Christian and a member in local churches, both here and overseas, I've seen a lot of mess. And, I've seen it in my own heart and my own family. And so have you. It seems like weekly I hear comments about hypocrisy in the church. In my years as a member of different local churches, I have seen enough sin to fill up volumes of books. Through the years I have seen pastors getting divorced, pastors addicted to prescription drugs or alcohol, pastors resigning their positions because of internet-led adultery (400 this week resigned due to the Ashley website), pastors who were burned out, staff conflict, church factions, silly fights over music styles, lazy Christians, hypocritical Christians, adulterous Christians, power plays, court cases, and a million other issues. I've been hurt. And, I know that I have hurt others, even as a missionary and a pastor. And, the older you are as a church member, you have experienced more. In order not to think about it all and not become disillusioned, you may think like one man who

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said, “*Church is kind of like sausage—it’s better to just enjoy the thing and not look to see how it all comes together behind the scenes.*”

Now, I know that the church should be different. And, it is. And, some churches are much godlier than others. And always, the goal is to grow in godliness. But, my point is that in the past, present, and in the future, the church will be full of sinners. If you leave your present church because of sin and conflict, you will find the same through the next door, I promise. We are sinners and we live with sinners. So, remember, the doctrine of original sin helps us understand why these things are.

One quick application: Consider Eph. 4:32 as the key to living together (in families and in church).

2. The doctrine of original sin gives us a realistic view of our future. I think we can look to the future with great confidence that Christ has overcome sin, that his kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven, that God will wipe away all our tears, and in the meantime we follow the advice of William Carey who said “*Attempt great things (for God).*” “*Expect great things (from God).*” Here at GBC we should expect to grow in godliness and as we grow in numbers, plant new churches. We must expect to see great things happen by faith. But, our dreams about what we think we should be, must not be unrealistic in a way where we think there will be no real and consistent problems along the way. In this world, we will not become some kind of utopia like we see with the Federation of Planets on Star Trek. Heaven will not come without some pretty major and noticeable events happening first, like . . . the cataclysmic destruction of the cosmos and the return of Christ. Yes, there are problems we can solve and have great strides in faith and godliness (God knows), but major obstacles and problems will remain.

As long as there are sinners on the earth, most of them unregenerate, and as long as we labor under the curse of Adam, and as long as creation groans in the pains of childbirth, the world is not going to be one happy planet of peace. I am not saying we shouldn’t be peacemakers. We must be peacemakers! But, we know that true peace comes only through Christ as hearts are changed.

If we look at the history of Christianity, we must know that the Gospel advances through persecutions and trials and tribulations. Do you remember when Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel in Lystra? During their time there, God healed a man who was crippled. The people tried to worship Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes. Many people believed. And immediately, many Jews came from the surrounding towns, stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city. Right after this the disciples gathered around him and we read: “**But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.** ²¹ **When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,** ²² **strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Act 14:22-23).**

There will be tribulations in this church. There will be tribulations in your Christian walk. There will be tribulations in your family and in your home. These things we must endure because we

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live in a world of sin, and the effects of sin are great in our lives, and the ruler of this world roars about like a lion seeking to devour. Life is short and full of troubles. This is our future until Christ returns. With this in mind, remember that this life together is like a marathon as we grow in godliness. We are not what we will be. Hang in there. Stick it out. The future is ours TOGETHER!

3. The doctrine of original sin helps us keep perspective. The doctrine of original sin can help us from drifting away from what matters most. The dangers of polling and looking at trends as we evaluate how we do things will always be changing. Churches are always looking to the new books or the new methods, or whatever, as they do ministry. One church says, "Do it this way." One church says "no, you must do it this way." But, if our focus is always on the "cutting edge" of relevance we will be forever doomed. Original sin keeps our focus on issues that are more timeless and don't come and go with each generation. Sinners will always be sinners. Our main problem isn't a lack of integration or balance or lack of success or education, or even poverty or injustice, as serious as these can be. Our main problem will always be sin. We must keep this in perspective.

We need perspective! What's hot and new now will, unless it is the rediscovery of something old and biblical, will end up being embarrassingly out of date and unhelpful in just a few years. WE must remember, what we gain people with is what we will keep them with. Therefore, we must preach the gospel of Christ, his death and his resurrection. We must do our best to be simple; simply the Bible. And as we look at our own lives and as we look around at other churches, things aren't as bad as they seem. God is still on his throne. He is still in the business of saving people. Yes, there are grave failings in the church. We need better preaching, better theology, more love for Jesus, more involvement in our neighborhoods, more evangelism, more cross-cultural missions, more generosity, more love, more biblical literacy, more discipleship, and so on. But, our perspective must be: We are still sinners. We still need a savior. The power of the Gospel is the power of salvation from beginning until glory. And, the same truths of time are still the same. We must make disciples, and disciples are sinners. So, let's keep things in perspective.

4. The doctrine of original sin forces us to be honest about ourselves and our remaining indwelling sin. This includes all of us, those who love the church and those who leave the church. It includes pastors. When I look at myself, sin remains. The problems aren't always "out there" somewhere. They begin in my own heart. I have not always represented Christ well. I certainly haven't loved each of you and cared for you as I ought, and neither have the other elders. I know the depths of my heart and the struggles I have with my remaining sin. The more I do this, the more my heart cries out, "*Oh wretched man that I am!*"

The same goes for all of you, brothers and sisters. Some of you need to own up to the responsibility for your negative impression on the church. To you, maybe the church isn't the beautiful bride of Christ where the kingdom of God is advanced in this world. All of us must admit that at times to many on the outside we look strange, and even unwelcoming. I do think we've gotten better at welcoming guests. But, in all honesty, our track record hasn't been the best.

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As elders, we know the problems of this church. And, so do you. We have goals about church planting, raising up leaders, doing better at evangelism and mercy ministry. We want to do better at home groups. We want to love one another better. When we look at our covenant together and consider the ways we have promised to live together, especially as we look at the depths of our hearts, we can only agree that we have fallen short. We are sinners. And sin remains. And the doctrine of original sin keeps us honest about who we are.

Now, I don't want to discourage you this morning at the same time. Though these things are true, it has been nothing but a joy to be a pastor at Grace. I love all of you and I can give example after example of your kindness to me and my family. I have been moved as people tell me they are praying for me and I know them well enough to believe them. I couldn't imagine working with a better group of elders who care for me and protect me and have my best interest at heart. Our deacons truly want to serve. I've seen home group leaders be faithful year after year. I've seen husbands love their wives and wives love their husbands and godly children. I've seen families try to obey the word. We have faithful musicians Sunday after Sunday for years. Andy has never complained to continue to serve us. I think Greg is sure he wants to become my personal secretary. The Harrison family feeds us with coffee. Families throughout the congregation have done whatever is asked of them.

I've seen many of you meet together with one another to make disciples. I am so excited about the young people and their desire to make disciples. And, what a blessing that many of you want to go on overseas trips. And all of you are so supportive! As a church you've followed the leadership of your elders. And, I look forward to so much more as the grace of God is displayed in this church. So, don't be too discouraged. My point is this: We are sinners and we will always have our problems. But, the grace of God will not fail. We must keep this in perspective as we are honest about our own sin.

5. The doctrine of original sin keeps the focus on the long haul as we prod along together in community. In other words, faithfulness to the task is what we need. There is nothing nobler than a lifetime of faithful, obedient service in the local church. Just prod along!

Our jobs are often mundane. Our devotional times seem like a waste. If we are honest, we must agree. Church services are usually forgettable. That's life! We drive to the same places, go through the same routines, buy the same groceries, and mow the same yard every spring and summer. Church is often the same—same doctrines, same order of worship, same preacher, same people. Life is usually pretty ordinary, just like following Jesus most days. Daily discipleship is not a new revolution each morning or an agent of global transformation every evening; it's a long obedience in the same direction.

I wonder how much our culture has influenced this aspect of our thinking. I know we have a consumer mindset. We want it now and want it fast and we want it entertaining and we want it the way we want it. When K-Mart doesn't work for us, we go to Wal-Mart. When we are bored with one church, we go to another one. And I see this sin particularly with young people (I remember my own views at a younger age.) We don't have a clue practically what Paul meant when he said, "**godliness with contentment is great gain**" (1 Tit. 6:6). Again, the most noble task for any Christian is a long faithful life in a local body of Christ called the Church.

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As we prepare to take the Lord's Supper, I will end with this. If you find yourself this morning with many of these feelings and tendencies, I must ask you, "*Have you lost your sense of wonder at the Gospel.*" For it is the power of God unto salvation. If you have lost the wonder of the Gospel, or if you've never had it, no wonder the same old hymns and songs and sermons and liturgies sound stale. Is it possible that you no longer find joy in so great a salvation! It is possible your boredom and your restlessness has less to do with the church and its doctrines and more to do with a growing coldness toward the love of God displayed in the sacrifice of His Son for our sins. Today, the gospel isn't what we need to do for God. It is about what God has done for us. "*This is my body, broken for you.*" It is the declaration of God's plan of redemption through the person and work of his Son. The same is true for the church. The church is the place where the Gospel is lived out. In the end, people who love the gospel love the church.