

The sermon

Intro

Sin. What is it? Biblically, sin is breaking God's commands. Sin is both condition (sinful nature) and behavior (actions). Sin is both external (behavior) and internal (attitudes, desires, thoughts). Sinful is what we are. Sin is what we do.

The American attitude towards sin is conflicting and a little fuzzy.

Sin is generally acknowledged, but not the sinful nature. Sin is real, it happens, our culture is messed up, but most people are inherently good. Most people are inherently good, only a few are truly evil, but systemic injustice and oppression are a real thing. People think those people are so hurtful and hateful, but I'm a good person. Americans are selective with sin. White lies are fair game. Getting drunk is having a good time. Animal cruelty is wicked.

What do you think?

Paul tells it like it is. Paul exposes us. We minimize the presence of sin to our own hurt!

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Two goals. First, we don't fall for the lies of false teachers. Second, we don't imitate their pattern.

Point 1: False teachers make much of themselves (3:1-4)

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. – 3:1

“last days” = the period of time that begins with Jesus' 1st coming and lasts till Jesus' 2nd coming.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. – **Hebrews 1:1-2**

Before the last days God spoke through the Old Testament prophets. When the *“last days”* arrived, God spoke through his Son Jesus = the days when Jesus walked on earth were the *“last days.”*

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. – **1 John 2:18**

The apostle John was living in *“the last hour.”*

“For people will be” (3:2) and *“For among them”* (3:6) = Paul's days are *“the last days.”*

Paul provides a long sin list that characterizes the behavior and attitudes of *“last days”* people.

We could go in many directions. What I've done is break these sins into three categories. These are people we need to beware of. These are sins we need to fight.

The posture in examining these sins isn't boy, these people are really bad. It's, is this me? Is this my heart? Am I this person? These are things God wants to rescue us from!

“lovers of self” = our love is self-centered. Selfish. Some call it narcissism, excessive love of self. It’s when I’m the supreme object of my affection. God isn’t celebrated and adored. I am. I’m the center of the universe. Everything should revolve around me, not God’s will and my neighbor’s good. My rights. My desires. Everything and everyone exists to serve me.

A self-centered society that doesn’t care about the common good is radically fallen.

“proud” = when we’re so proud of ourselves that we brag about it. Bragging, boasting, showing-off. **“proud”** captures the action: boasting. **“arrogant”** captures the attitude.

“arrogant” = proud. Thinking that we’re so great, so much better than others.

“disobedient to their parents” = refusing to submit to authority because we want to do things our own way. Hatred for any restraint that will interfere with our desires.

A society where children get their own way and don’t learn submission to authority is radically fallen.

“ungrateful” = not thankful when we should be, whether to God or a person. When we’re so spoiled that we complain and get angry when someone generously gives us a gift because it isn’t up to our standard. They took time to think of me and I resent them for it.

Self-love says I deserve more.

“unappeasable” = unwillingness to reconcile with others. Refusal to work towards a peaceful solution. No desire to end the hostility. Unwilling to forgive.

Self-love plays a part. I’m not willing to budge unless I get what I want. My wants. My desires are king, not God’s will.

“not loving good” = having no interest in what’s good, particularly the public good. No concern for the interests of other people.

When self is king, we don’t care about the interests of one another.

“swollen with conceit” = puffed up, overly impressed with myself, absurd sense of my own importance. Very proud/arrogant to the point where we become irrational. We expect people to revolve around our desires. I should be worshipped and celebrated. Everyone in the church should adjust to my preferences.

Summary

The picture is obsessive love of self can leave us in a delusional state. Blinded by self-worship, we’re blind to our sin.

Self-love leads to relational difficulties. We refuse to resolve conflicts. We turn people off with our ungratefulness and our bragging.

Self-love leads to rejection of authority. Why should anything interfere with my desires?

We’re not God-centered because self is our functional God.

Self-centeredness is destructive every which way. We don’t see our sin. We don’t care about others. We turn people off with our self-obsession. Our relationships suffer. We don’t bring ourselves under God’s good authority structures.

The most troubled people I’ve observed are the most self-centered. In God’s good and wise design, the world revolves around his will, not mine. When we think God’s world revolves around our desires, we’re in for a world of disappointment! We’ll be ruining ourselves by bucking God’s commands. And we’ll repeatedly encounter people who

don't think our desires are the greatest good in the universe. Crazy thought. There are people out there who don't wake up in the morning thinking about how they can ensure every one of your desires is met.

Practical question: is God or myself or something else the supreme object of my affection?

Point 2: False teachers are dangerous (3:1-4)

Self-centered people are dangerous!

“abusive” = abusive speech. Harming people with our mouths. Defamation of character. Demeaning words.

“heartless” = without love, lacking natural affection, unfeeling, having no regard for others. The mother with zero concern for her infant. A child with zero concern for their parents. Church people with zero concern for another's plight.

“slanderous” = making false accusations against a person. Lies.

“brutal” = like an untamed animal. Fierce, vicious, lacking in mercy. Devouring people.

“treacherous” = betrayer, traitor, used of Judas. Betraying people's trust.

“reckless” = rash, thoughtless, rushed behavior.

Summary

This person is dangerous because they have no feeling for other people. Self-obsession kills feeling for others. Blinded by self-love, we don't see the needs around us. Blinded by self-love, we don't care. We only see what's in it for me?

As a result, we ruin others with our mouths. We betray people for our own advantage. We devour people when they get in the way of our self-seeking agenda. We don't think about the consequences. We want what we want. So we rush in headlong.

The picture isn't pretty. The person with zero feeling for others is a danger to everyone they come in contact with.

Practical question: In what ways am I damaging other people?

Point 3: False teachers have disordered passions (3:2-4)

People are self-centered and dangerous because their passions are disordered.

“lovers of money” = longing for wealth, coveting stuff, greedy. Money and stuff has my heart.

“unholy” = opposition to God instead of devotion to God which leads to rejecting God's commands and evil behavior.

“without self-control” = lacking moral restraint, subject to my fallen passions. Can't control myself. Can't resist.

“lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” = when pleasure is our goal rather than God's glory. When we're ruled by pleasures rather than God's will. When pleasing ourselves is more important than pleasing God.

Our passion(s) is something other than God. God has been displaced from the throne. Pleasure is our functional god.

Application

The word translated “*passions*” in 2:22 (“*youthful passions*”) and 3:6 (“*various passions*”) is sometimes a positive desire (Phil 1:23 – “*to depart and be with Christ*”) and often sinful desire (2:22; 3:6). Passion means desire. What we long for. Passion/desire can be good or bad.

It’s good to have a passion for “*righteousness, faith, love, and peace*” (2:22) and the fruits of the Spirit. It’s bad to have a passion for sin. It’s bad to have zero passion/desire for godliness.

To have desires is to be human. We’re created in the image of God. God has desires. The goal is having desires that agree with God’s desires. The temptation is to have desires (money, pleasure) that displace God.

Since we were created to know and love and worship and serve God, we ruin ourselves and others when we put created things above God.

Practical question: What are my passions/desires in life?

Point 4: False teachers target weak people (3:5-7)

having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. – 3:5

This one strikes me as odd. People who fit these horrific qualities have “*the appearance of godliness*”? Sometimes we can be deceived by appearances.

Outwardly they appear godly, but inwardly they’re a selfish, sinful mess = no power = no spiritual life. For a season they hide who they are.

And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. – **2 Corinthians 11:14-15**

We protect ourselves, to the best of our ability, through church membership and church discipline.

“*Avoid such people*” = don’t give them a hearing. Don’t trust them.

For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, – 3:6

False teachers look for vulnerable people who lack wisdom and are struggling with sinful passions.

“*weak women*” = foolish, lacking in wisdom.

always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. – 3:7

False teachers look for vulnerable people who aren’t grounded in truth. Here their targets were women who heard a lot about Jesus, but they never actually believed.

Sounds a lot like what terrorists do. Terrorists seek to groom followers by identifying people who are angry with society, lonely, and don’t fit in. Terrorists exploit such people by empathizing with their hurt, exploiting their vulnerabilities (e.g., anger, fear, hurt, loneliness), and giving them a new sense of identity, purpose, and belonging. They proceed to isolate people from family and friends by creating mistrust. Indoctrination follows.

Application

Deception is everywhere today. Yes, TV prosperity preachers. Yes, Jehovah's Witnesses. But my greatest concern is online. There's infinite access to falsehood on Facebook, YouTube, and whatever else you expose yourself to. I can go on YouTube and learn why I shouldn't trust my Bible, why I should deconstruct my faith, why I should convert to Catholicism. I can also find good stuff that tells me why I should have 100% confidence in my Bible. My point isn't delete YouTube. My point is false teaching is easily accessible. It doesn't have to be someone knocking on your door.

How do we protect ourselves?

1. Wisdom.
2. Putting sin to death.
3. Godly passions.
4. Settled gospel convictions.

These women were vulnerable targets because of **what hadn't taken place** in their lives. Knowledge matters. Purity matters. Desires matter. Convictions matter.

Practical question: am I susceptible to false teachers? In what way?

Point 5: False teachers are characterized by observable folly (3:8-9)

Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. – 3:8

In Jewish writings that weren't Scripture Jannes and Jambres were Egyptian magicians that opposed Moses by seeking to duplicate miracles God worked through Moses (see Exod 7:8-13).

“corrupted in mind” = their minds have been corrupted by Satan's lies. That's why they're self-centered. That's why they have disordered passions. That's why they're dangerous.

“disqualified regarding the faith” = they don't pass the test of gospel faithfulness: beliefs and practice. *“the faith”* = the doctrines found in the gospel.

But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. – 3:9

“will not get very far” = they'll have some influence, but a limited influence. *“their folly will be plain to all”* = Paul's confident the Christians in Ephesus will see them for the shams that they are.

On the outside they look good. But if we look a little closer we'll find some red flags.

Application

When you're presented with new thoughts, you need to be Bereans. Is that so? Is that really in the Bible? If it's there, embrace it. If it isn't, reject it. Is it a half-truth? Partially, but not quite correct. Are they excluding something critical?

We have to ask some questions. Is this person opposing the truth in their conduct? Is this idea opposing the truth? What's being encouraged? What's being discouraged?

If we know our Bibles well enough, lies should be obvious to us. We should be able to detect something's a bit off.

Paul's confident in the Ephesian believers. I should have confidence in you. I should have confidence you can have a conversation with a Jehovah's Witness without leaving the church. I should have confidence you can scroll on YouTube without abandoning the faith.

What's critical is community. Let's navigate the lies of our day together. Share with one another what you're hearing. Help one another evaluate what you're hearing. Measure it with Scripture.

We want to be a knowledgeable, discerning people.

Practical question: do I know my Bible well enough to detect a fraud?

Conclusion

Sin. It deceives us. It enslaves us. It shames us. It kills our relationships. Is there any hope?

Yes.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." – John 3:16

Jesus died to rescue us from the penalty of sin. Jesus died to bring us forgiveness of sins. Relief from the shame. Assurance that we are accepted by the holy, sin-hating God.

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" – John 7:38

Jesus died to rescue us from the power of sin. So that we wouldn't be heartless, swollen with conceit, without self-control, and treacherous.

Jesus came so that we could flourish in community with fellow believers. So that we might have a respite from the treacherous world out there. So that we might be restored and equipped in the church to go into a world ravaged by sin with the good news of rescue from sin through Jesus Christ.

Have you experienced forgiveness of sins? Have you experienced the new birth? If not, turn to Jesus. Confess your sins to God. Acknowledge that your only hope of rescue is Jesus' death. Ask God for forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' death. And trust that God receives all who come to him through his Son Jesus.

Christian, reject false gospels. Christian, don't imitate these self-centered, enslaved, dangerous false teachers.