

The Vocabulary Of Sin

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[0 : 00] Okay, this evening we are going to turn back to Romans 5 and we can read again at verse 15. But the free gift is not like the trespass, for if many died through one man's trespass, how much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

We are working through a new series in our evening services, well not just our evening services, just wherever it is that I am over this month. We are working through a series called Taking Sin Seriously.

And in this series we are looking at different aspects of the Bible's teaching about sin. And as we said when we started this series last week, in lots of ways that seems like a potentially depressing and negative way to start a year.

And for lots of people sin is not what we want to focus on. And for some people the Bible's emphasis on sin is actually very off-putting. And they find it offensive and in many ways it makes them want to push the Bible to one side.

I hope that that's not the case for us. And I hope that this series will actually be very, very helpful for all of us because we need to take sin seriously.

[1 : 14] And what I'm hoping that we'll discover is that in this series we discover two things. We discover how important the gospel really is.

And we discover how beautiful the gospel really is. And those two things will become clearer and clearer the more we take sin seriously.

And as we said last week, to take sin seriously is simply to think about sin in the way that we think about all the other things in our lives that are incredibly important.

So if we're sending our children off on the bus to school in primary one or something like that, we make absolutely sure that they get onto that bus safely.

The driver makes absolutely sure that they put their seatbelt on. They make absolutely sure that they're kept safe. That's because of how precious these children are.

[2 : 19] If you're going on a boat, as we said last time, you take the weather seriously. If you're cooking chicken, you take the amount of time that you cook that chicken seriously so that you don't serve it medium rare, which is not good for chicken.

In all of these situations, when you're taking something serious like that, whether it's road safety or whether it's hygiene or whether it's going out in potentially dangerous weather, you're doing those things for one reason.

You're doing those things so that you end up not dead. All of these things are done to preserve our lives and to prevent death. The Bible takes sin seriously for exactly the same reason.

And so as we started this series last week, we'll highlight every time that we don't take sin seriously in order to increase our misery and to be grumpy or negative or gloomy.

We take sin seriously to discover more about the thrilling, life-giving joy and hope of the gospel. And as we think about sin, we need to think about the following statement that I'm going to write here.

[3 : 36] God is absolutely perfect. And I want to ask you a question.

Do you want that to be true? Do you want that statement to be true? And I think the answer is yes, of course we do.

If God is going to be the ultimate explanation of everything that there is, if God is going to be the foundation of our lives, if God is going to be the one that we totally depend on, then we absolutely want God to be absolutely perfect.

And of course, an imperfect God is no God at all. An imperfect God is not worthy of our worship or our service or our adoration.

It's the absolute perfection of God that makes him worthy of our worship, worthy of our praise. It makes him the one that we marvel at.

[4 : 44] So you look at that statement and you think, yes, that's exactly what we want God to be. That is exactly what we want God to be. But if that statement is true, then it immediately presents us with a massive problem.

He is absolutely perfect. And we are not. He's infinite and impeccable.

And we are not. He is utterly pure and utterly holy. And we are not. And the minute you start to think about that in any depth, you realize that it creates a massive problem.

Because we think, how can we come anywhere near him? And of course, that's what you see in the Old Testament. What do you see? When God's at the top of Sinai, they can't go anywhere near him.

When God is dwelling in the Holy of Holies in the temple, they can't go anywhere near him. And we're left with that question. How is it possible for us to come anywhere near God?

[5 : 55] And that's the question that the whole Bible is dealing with. And to understand that problem, we need to take sin seriously. Tonight, our focus is on the vocabulary of sin.

And we're going to look at some of the terms that the Bible uses for sin. And we're going to look at five that are all taken from, that lists the five terms that we're going to look at this evening.

And it's just a beautiful wee summary of these terms that the New Testament uses. There are other terms and concepts used throughout the Bible in both the Old Testament and the New. We're just going to pick out five that come from the New Testament.

Five words that you'll have maybe seen many times as you read the Bible. They are sin, transgression, trespass, debt, and lawlessness. And we'll look at them one by one tonight.

So the first one is in the chapter that we read. In fact, three of them are in the chapter that we read. Romans 5.12 This is the Greek word hamartia.

[7 : 10] And this is one of the most common, perhaps even the most common word that's used in the Bible in relation to sin. What does it mean? Well, when you think about it, you need to be thinking about a target.

You can be thinking maybe of archery if you've seen a target like that. I'm sure that's something that we've all done at various points in our lives. We stand and we're aiming the bow and arrow.

I wasn't planning on drawing this much detail, but I'm getting carried away now. We're aiming a bow and arrow and we're firing at the target. And this word conveys the idea of missing the mark.

And hitting there or there or there or there. On a target, you have a bullseye that you want to hit. Right there in the middle. Hamartia conveys the idea of missing that.

Falling short. Missing the mark. And that really captures a huge amount of what sin involves. God has a goal and a target for our lives.

[8 : 20] He has made us to be image bearers. Made us to fulfill that purpose that no other part of creation is to serve. We and we alone are made as the image of God. Made to live for him.

To know him. To represent him. To serve him. And when we sin, we contradict and violate that image. We miss the mark.

We fall short of the glorious purposes that God has for us. And it's important to think about this.

Because first and foremost, what we have to recognize is that whole idea of hitting a target is emphasizing something crucial.

It's highlighting the fact that this whole concept presupposes that the Bible's intentions for us are of the highest and best level.

So what God wants for humanity and for what God wants humanity to be is the best. He wants us to hit that target. He wants us to reach that standard. He's made us to be something beautiful and wonderful.

[9 : 24] And so missing a mark all presupposes the fact that there was a mark. And we were made for better. And sin is pulling us away from that. And we're falling short.

And at one level, whilst that, as we'll say, does expose our sin, at another level it reminds us that humanity is made to be something beautiful. Made to be something so good.

The whole reason this is a problem is because you've been made for a wonderful and beautiful purpose. Now there's two aspects to this. One is when we aim for the right things, but we fall short.

So that's a bit like what I've got in the picture there. The right thing to do is in the middle of that target. And we aim for it, but we fall short. And often that can be the experience in our lives.

There's things that we know are right that we want to do. We want to be patient. We want to be kind. We want to be wise. We want to be upright. We all have a moral conscience as those who are made in the image of God.

[10:26] And we know that there's something that we want to do. We want to achieve. And yet so often we fall short. And we don't show the level of patience or kindness or wisdom that we want to and that we are aiming for.

And so we've got targets like humility and patience and compassion and maturity. We think, I want to reach that target. And maybe we've got New Year's resolutions that sort of convey this idea. I want to reach that. And yet so often we fall short. But the other thing that we can do is that not so much missing the right target, but we can also aim for the completely wrong target and hit the bullseye.

And that can very often be what happens in our lives. And so somebody hurts us or frustrates us at work and we put up the target of revenge and we hit the bullseye.

Somebody does something that exasperates us and we put up the target of criticism and we hit the bullseye.

[11:35] Somebody wrongs us and we put up the target of unforgiveness and we hit the bullseye. All of those are the wrong targets. We're missing the mark.

We're sinning against God. And all of this is reminding us, if we're made to aim for that target right there, it's reminding us that there's no area of neutrality before God.

We're either hitting that target every single time in every single part of our lives or we're sinners.

That's the two choices that we have.

Either absolute moral perfection or we're sinners. And we know straight away what category we fall into.

James says, whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has been accountable for all of it. That's the Bible's emphasis. God's standards are that high. Even one occasion when we miss the target, it makes us a sinner.

[12:41] And of course, our experience tells us that it's way more than one occasion that that happens. So, that's the first one, Hamartia. Second one is in 514. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

This is the word parabasis and it means transgression. And this is the idea of, the idea here is the idea of overstepping or stepping across.

That word para is like the word for across or alongside. Basis is coming from the word to go. So, it's like going across, cutting across, overstepping.

And so, the idea is like stepping over a boundary. So, you think maybe of like a keep off the grass sign that you've seen. You know, there's that kind of boundary marker in life. Whatever it may be, it's setting a path whereby on this side you can walk, on this side you can't.

And so, you have a boundary, but you step across. Please forgive my stick man for his very long leg. But, you know what I mean. A boundary that we are not meant to cross.

[13:57] We transgress. And that whole idea of boundaries is actually really important for understanding God's law. When God gives us his law, when you think of the likes of the Ten Commandments, the Ten Commandments are not there to kind of lock you in a cage, to put you in a box and to say, you must not do this, you must not do that, you must not do the next thing.

That's not what the Ten Commandments are trying to do at all. Instead, what the Ten Commandments are trying to do is really set out a fence for our lives. So, this is a different drawing, okay.

You're setting out a fence for your lives here. And those are the boundary markers. And within that, within those boundary markers, we can live freely. We can thrive.

We can exercise our choice. We can exercise our abilities. We can live. And we're living in this safe space within the boundaries. And so, God's law is not there to kind of box you into a corner so that there's all these things that you can't do.

Instead, God's law is there to say, look, these are the boundaries for life. Within them, there is freedom and beauty and opportunity. But don't step over the line.

[15:11] Transgression is when we say, no, I think I'll step over the line. I'm going to do it. And we do that in many, many ways.

Parabasis, this word, is wanting to step over the line that God has set. And again, there's two aspects to this that are important to recognize. One is that this is an act of rebellion. So, God said, that's the line.

Don't cross it. And we're like, I'm crossing it. And so, it's a defiant act against God. And it's one of the many, many times, it's conveying the idea that what we do and what I've done loads of times in my life is where you think, I know God has said don't do this.

But I actually know better. And I'll do it. And so, it's a kind of defiant act against God's command. And it's putting our judgment over God's judgment. And it's just thinking that actually, you know, we'll decide the rules for ourselves.

And of course, Adam's sin in Eden was exactly like that. And it's referred to, Adam is referred to here. It's the transgression of Adam. God had said to him, you can have any of the fruit, just not this one.

[16:16] And so, that was the whole idea of there's a boundary. Before the boundary, there's freedom. You've got the whole garden. You can have any fruit you want, just not that one. Don't cross that line. Adam says, I'm crossing that line.

And so, it's a great example. Adam's a great example of what we do all the time, thinking that we know better than God. So, it's an act of rebellion against God. But the second thing that's so important to recognize, can I just rub out, it's also an act of self-destruction.

And if I, can I just rub out my terrible drawing and draw another equally terrible one. I drew a fence there. What might be better for us to draw is actually like, it's like a cliff edge.

And when we're transgressing God's law, we think we're stepping over a boundary into freedom. We're actually stepping over a line that leads to destruction.

And so, not only are we defying God, we're also destroying ourselves. We're also destroying ourselves. And it's so important for us to remember that the boundaries that God's law sets are there for our well-being and for our safety.

[17:26] If you imagine going down to a beach, well, it used to be there. I think it's fallen down. You go down to Dalmore and for a long time, there was a sign there saying, be really careful.

There's dangerous currents here. Is that sign there to ruin everyone's tip to the beach? Of course it's not. That sign is there to make sure that people are safe.

And that's what God's law is there for. But we transgress it. And we put ourselves into danger.

Okay, the third word is from, it happens loads of times in Romans.

It's the word *paraptoma*, and that's translated trespass. Sometimes this is what also translated transgression, which can be a little confusing. Helpfully here in Romans, there's a clear distinction. You've got trespass is the word that the ESV has used.

And it comes up again and again and again. What is this conveying? I'll just read verse 15. It says, the free gift is not like the trespass, but if many died through one man's trespass, much more the grace of God.

[18:29] And the free gift, by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many. The idea that you need to have in your head for this one is the idea of a road. So we're thinking of a pathway here.

And that's going off into the distance. I'm getting my perspective so magnificently drawn here. I shouldn't really have two lanes in it because it's not a two-way road. But anyway.

And the idea of this language is that there's a road, there's a path, and when we trespass, we are slipping off that road.

So that's the path that we should walk on. But instead, we've seen something over here and we're like, oh, I think I'll go over there instead. And we slip off the road and we end up going in the wrong direction and taking our own path.

And that can happen in loads of different ways. It can happen through temptation. So we're following the Lord, trying to listen to him, and yet then we see something and it tempts us and we're attracted to it. And that's one of the huge difficulties that we have is that we find sin attractive and it draws us away from the Lord.

[19:36] Sometimes it can happen through distraction. So you're going along the road and you just sort of stop paying attention. You stop looking towards your destination and you wander off because we stop looking to the Lord, stop listening to his words, stop praying to him, stop paying attention, and we end up disorientated.

And sometimes it can happen through us being disrupted by an external influence. Something can knock us off the path. And so we're going along, we're following the Lord, but we're following the Lord's ways.

We're listening to him. But something happens to us in our lives that knocks us off. And in all of these ways, we can slip into sin. And it's all conveying to us the idea of direction.

God has given us a direction for our lives. He wants us to live out our lives in a way that's following him. And as we follow him, we are doing so in obedience.

So he gives us instructions for our families, for what marriage should look like, for what parenting should involve. And we think, I'm going to follow that. He gives us instructions for how we should worship in church.

[20 : 35] We think, I'm going to follow that. He gives us instructions for how we should conduct ourselves in regard to our own property, in regard to other people's property. We think, I'm going to follow that in my life.

And lots of other ways God gives us instructions. We want to follow them in our lives. And paraptoma is when we slip away from that path. And instead, sometimes this can be intentional. Sometimes it can be unintentional. But instead, we start following a different set of rules for our lives. And you see that this is the thing that can be so difficult for us.

Because, again, my drawings are a wee bit limited here. But Jesus speaks about the broad road and the narrow road. And sometimes, you know, when we draw the broad road and the narrow road, we can think of the narrow road going this way and the broad road going this way.

As though it's like a kind of, you're sitting at a crossroads here. And you have to make a decision, well, which way am I going to go? And that's maybe helpful. But I think it's probably more accurate to think of it like this.

[21 : 39] Like, no, I'm going to get rid of that. Hold on. To think of the broad road is like a, sorry, hold on. The broad road is like a big highway going this way, like this.

It's all going this way, going this way, going this way. Everyone's going this way, everyone's going this way, everyone's going this way. Everyone's going this way. And the narrow road is going this way, right in the middle of it.

That's really what the path of discipleship is like. Everyone is going, I'm going to follow my arrows that I'm doing it right here. Everyone's going this way. And when you turn around and follow Jesus, you're starting to walk against the tide.

And it's so easy to slip off that in a paraptoma because everybody else is going the other way. And so like a great example, you know, would be in our society today would be sexual ethics.

That's a really, really clear example where the narrow path of scripture is very different to what the rest of the world around us is seeing. And so often we can be pulled to live by their set of rules rather than by God's set of rules.

[22 : 54] And in loads of other ways, often following the Lord means walking against the tide of the world around us. And that makes it really easy for us to slip.

And it gets us all to think about this whole idea of influence in our lives. If we're talking about a road that we're walking along, if we're following the Lord's guidance in our lives, then we are being influenced by him.

But if we are paraptomaing, if we're trespassing, if we're wandering off in a direction that we shouldn't, it's because other voices are influencing us instead of the Lord's.

And so it's very easy for that to happen. The fourth one is debt, as we have in the Lord's Prayer. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

This is the language, not so much of finances, but the finance image is helping us. It's the idea of obligation. It's the idea of what is owed to another. And so in Matthew 6, here in the Lord's Prayer, sin is being described as the idea of owing God a debt.

[24 : 05] We have an obligation towards him, a duty required of us, and yet we fail to meet that obligation. And this is important for us to think about.

If you're thinking about the language of debt, sometimes if we think about this, if this is righteousness here, if this is doing what's right, we're made to do what's right, like this.

That's what we're made to do, and of course, we fail to do that. But it's easy to think that, oh, well, if I fail to do that, then that just leaves me kind of here. I'm kind of neutral before God.

Yes, I'm not as good as I should be, but I'm not that bad. But the idea of debt is getting us to see that that's not the case, that the truth is we're like this. We're in the red, we're in the negative before God.

We're not neutral before him, and we're absolutely not conforming before him. We are in the red. What we owe to him, we've not given to him. He's our creator.

[25 : 08] We owe him everything. And yet, we have not fulfilled that obligation. Now, this is massively important for us to think of it, because it is so easy, and you see this very, very regularly.

It's so easy to approach God thinking that he owes us. And so often, people will see that. You'll see that in people, that there's that kind of mindset that actually God owes them.

That if something bad happens, it shouldn't happen. I don't deserve this. And I want this, and I'm not getting it. And there's that mindset that God owes me. It's like, well, that's not the way it is.

The truth is, we owe God. We owe him a debt. So there's hamartia, there's parabasis, there's paraptoma, there's debt, which in Greek, I forgot to read the Greek word, is *ophilema*.

I should have written that and translated it before. Sorry. Of-of-a-*lema*. That's how you say that. Of-a-*lema*. Last one is the word *anomia*, which means lawlessness.

[26 : 18] 1 John 3, 4. Whoever makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. And in many ways, this captures everything that we've been saying. God set the target with his law.

He set out the boundaries with his law. He set out the standard. He set out the pathway with his law. He set out the standard to which we are conformed according to his law. And sin disregards all of that.

Sin is lawlessness. And this is emphasizing just the fact that sin really involves a complete rejection of God's law, a rejection of God's authority. It's a kind of contempt for God and for his ways.

And it's reminding us what God is, that the law is telling us, it's revealing to us what God is like. It's revealing to us that God himself has defined sin according to his character.

And we're made by God. We're made to follow his law. And Donald MacLeod explains this quite well when he says that we are made to be in what's called a theonomous context.

[27 : 26] *Onomos*, *nomos*, that's from the Greek word for law. *Theos* is the Greek word for God. We are made to be ruled by God. We're made to be in a theonomous context.

But instead, we want to be in an autonomous context. *Auto* means the self. We want to be self-ruled. We want to be autonomous before God.

We want to make up the rules. And so sin is rejecting God's law. That's one aspect of what's been taught to us here. But secondly, when we think about lawlessness, it's telling us more than that.

It's telling us not just that we're rebelling against God's law, but it's also telling us that sin is just a complete rejection of law and order and coherence in our lives.

Sin, in other words, is totally anomalous. It's not orderly. It's not coherent. It's not explainable. It's irrational.

[28 : 26] It's incoherent. And it's disgustingly messy. And so when we think of sin, it's so important for us to recognize that sometimes when we think about, you know, good, what God wants for us in sin, we can sometimes think that they're slightly different versions of the same thing.

So we think of God's standards. You know, he's given us a list of things, and we want to just conform to that list and that standard. It's very easy to think that sin is like a kind of similar but different version of that.

So according to God's standards, for example, you know, it says go to church. And that's a good thing to do. Whereas a sinful version of that is to go to the pub instead.

Go somewhere else. And we can have lots of different ways like that. You know, God's standards would say, you know, well, always tell the truth. And sin would say, well, you don't always have to tell the truth.

You know, it's actually okay to lie sometimes. And so you've got, it's as though, you know, you've got a good list and a bad list. That's actually not an accurate way to think of sin at all. Sin is not a list, like an opposite version of list from God.

[29 : 38] Sin is just an absolute, disgusting, incoherent, totally crazy mess. It's utterly irrational. It's got no order.

It's got no coherence. It's destructive. It's meaningless. It's ruthless. It's merciless. And how do you know that's true? How do we know? Because this actually echoes, this actually echoes our

experience so often.

Because when you look at that side, you know, you've got the idea of law and it's orderly. And we must never think that sin is just a different version of that. And we know that this is true because, how do we know it's true?

Because sin will never keep its promises. And we think it will. We think sin is just a kind of like, bader version of what God does.

And so sin promises that, if you have more money, you'll feel secure and safe. And if you, if you can have, if you look at pornography, it's going to make you feel better about yourself.

[30 : 46] If you, if you, if you get that person back, and if you refuse to forgive them, it'll make you feel stronger. And a thousand other ways, sin makes all these promises. It never keeps them.

Because it doesn't want to make an orderly list of things that just contrast with God.

It just wants to wreck everything. It just wants to destroy our lives. And so many times, the devil has lured people with promises to say, if you do this, you'll feel better.

And people do it. And they come, so they come to the devil and say, can you, can you give me my promise now? And he's like, huh. He's like, I've got no interest in keeping any promises to you.

Sin's just a mess. So we have some incredibly powerful images before us in all these words. And time is running out.

This is, this is really frustrating. Anyway, I need to get through this very, very quickly. Why do we need to know all this? First of all, it shows us that, that we need to take sin seriously.

[31 : 57] Sin's not this tiny topic. It's not this thing that, you know, doesn't really matter. And it's just a bit, it's not sin is, is all of this and more. And so we must not be casual about the seriousness of sin.

We must not be careless about the danger of sin. We must not be deceived by the attractiveness of sin. We mustn't be complacent with the easiness of sin. We must not be surprised at the devastating effect of sin.

And we must not be comfortable with the presence of sin. Sin's awful. Sin's awful in every way. But what I want you to see most of all, is that, that this, this is showing you the awfulness and seriousness of sin.

But as we see that, we are discovering just how amazing the gospel is. Because the message of the gospel is not, you mustn't do these things.

The message of the gospel is actually, God saying, I know that you've done all these things. And I'm going to fix it all.

[33 : 10] I'm going to forgive you for everything. And I'm going to put it right. And I want to show you some verses where all these concepts are dealt with.

We read this at the start. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. The blood of Jesus Christ, his son cleanses us from all sin. That's hamartia. All cleansed. All gone. Romans 9, 15. He's a mediator of a new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promise of eternal life. A death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the Lord.

That's parabasis. Done. Dealt with. Redeemed from them. Romans 5, 15. The free gift is not like the trespass. This is the verse that we read at the start.

That's paraptoma. We slip away. One man's trespass has caused sin for all of us. But the grace of God has abounded through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[34 : 14] Colossians 2. It uses a different word, but it's the same concept that's been highlighted here. You were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. God made alive. You who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh.

God has made alive with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

And then Romans 8, 14. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do, by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

And for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous but a call might be fulfilled in us. who walk according not to the flesh but according to the spirit.

All of these verses are teaching us that everything that sin is and everything that sin has done to you and in every single way that sin condemns you and crushes you, Jesus has dealt with it. [35 : 29] Jesus has dealt with it all. And this is where we can come back to the statement that we made at the start. God is absolutely perfect.

And on our own, our sin condemns us before him. but we can run into his arms because our saviour is absolutely perfect.

God is and he's calling us all to trust in him Amen