

# A Theology Of Mistakes

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I love that tune, amazing, just amazing. Well, please turn again to Galatians chapter six, and let me read again verses one to two. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Our title this morning is A Theology of Mistakes.

And now that title could probably be easily misunderstood, and if we think about it the wrong way, it could easily sound very controversial because it could be taken to be talking about all the theological opinions that we think are wrong.

So we look at what other people believe, and we say, oh, theirs is a theology full of mistakes, and you might think that, well, oh, maybe today, the sermon's gonna be all about the mistakes in other churches.

If I did preach that sermon, I'd probably get 1,000 views or 10,000 views on YouTube, but it is absolutely not what I want to do, and it's not what I mean by that title. That title, A Theology of Mistakes, is not about us highlighting other people's theological error.

[ 1 : 1 6 ] It's about the fact that we make mistakes. It's about the fact that everyone makes mistakes. And the key question we're asking is, what does the theology of the Gospel teach us about our mistakes?

And I want us to look at three things, understanding our mistakes, addressing our mistakes, responding to the mistakes in others. So first of all, oh, sorry, wrong button.

First of all, understanding our mistakes. The first thing that we need to say here is maybe a bit obvious, but in order for us to understand our mistakes, we need to understand that mistakes are mistakes.

Mistakes are mistakes, and by that, I mean the fact that mistakes are not good. They are not what we want. They're not a positive thing. Mistakes are mistakes.

Mistakes are mistakes. And that's captured in the language of transgression that Paul uses in this verse. You can see that word there. That comes from a Greek word.

[ 2 : 2 7 ] The Greek word is paraptoma. Don't worry about that too much, but just so you know it. Paraptoma, and it can also be translated, tespas, it literally means to fall beside.

And so it's conveying the idea of a misstep, of falling off the right path, of taking a full step and turning in a direction that's a mistake.

And so if you imagine a road or a path that you're walking on, maybe a particularly narrow one, a paraptoma, a transgression, a tespas, is to slip or to step off that path.

And when we do that, we're making a mistake. And one of the things that's really important when we're talking about understanding mistakes is to say that it's really important that we don't dilute this whole issue.

Because when we talk about mistakes, and when we're talking about that, we're obviously talking about the bigger issue of sin that the Bible repeatedly emphasizes to us. Sometimes we just want to play that down.

- [ 3 : 35 ] And we want to try and just not think much about that. And we want to try and just minimize it. We want to be very lenient on ourselves in terms of our behavior, although very often we're not very lenient on others.
- And often we don't want to face up to the fact that some things are mistakes, but to do that is an error. Mistakes are mistakes.
- And these mistakes can happen in lots of different ways. And the verses that we read from, that they'll read from in Galatians 6, hint towards the three areas where our mistakes are made.
- Our mistakes are made in terms of our thinking, in our words, and in our actions.
- And these are all hinted at in the verses. Above, first of all, our thinking, and you see it explicitly expressed right there. This is incredibly important for us to consider because when we do that, we quickly discover that it's incredibly easy to make mistakes in the way that we think.
- [ 4 : 43 ] And often those mistaken thoughts will lead on to a huge amount of problems for us. In these verses, Paul is talking about the whole issue of boasting.
- You see it mentioned there. And he talks about how we can think of ourselves as something when actually we're nothing. And as he talks about this, he is presenting to us what we could call the something that's nothing principle.
- Okay, so you see those two words are being used in the text. You've got something when he is nothing. I want us to think about that in terms of the something that's nothing principle.
- And in regard to boasting, what he's saying there is quite clear. We can have a very inflated view of ourselves and we're captivated by our own self-importance and we're oblivious to how small and insignificant we really, really are.
- Now, obviously that something nothing language is not literal. Even Paul knows that even the biggest boasting in the world is still something, he's still a person. But the point he's making is crucial that in regard to boasting, it's really easy to fall into a kind of arrogant mindset that sees ourselves as far bigger, far more important than we really are.
- [ 5 : 58 ] And when we do that in our thinking, we're making a mistake. But I want us to maybe kind of dig deeper into this whole issue because I want to suggest that that something nothing, something that's nothing principle, actually lies behind a lot of the mistakes that we can make in our thinking.
- Let me give you three more examples. Example number one is in terms of idolatry. So when we talk about idolatry, we're talking about taking something or someone and making that the most important thing in our lives.
- And we give that idolatry, the devotion and honor and attention that should only ever be given to God. And the minute we do that, we're falling into the something that's nothing trap because we think that the idol is gonna give us something.
- So money will give us security. A better car will give us more self-esteem. Sexual intimacy will make us feel complete. A successful career will give us purpose.
- Good grades will give us satisfaction. And all of those things can be a positive blessing in our lives in the right place. But if we make them the idol that we live for, if we put them before Jesus, and if we put our energy and our commitment and our hopes into anything that's not Jesus, then the something that we think that the idol will give us will never come.
- [ 7 : 30 ] It'll just leave us empty. So we think that money will give us security, but we always feel that we need a bit more. We feel that success will give us self-esteem.

And yet we're always terrified of the next failure that might be around the corner. So many people have made the mistake of thinking that an idol will give them something that they desperately need and it's left them empty.

The idol that they thought was something has turned out to be nothing. And that kind of thinking is a mistake. Example number two is negativity.

So that's when we look at the people around us or the circumstances we're in, and we judge everything in a negative way. We view things in the worst possible light. Another way to say it is just, it's about being paranoid and thinking the worst of every individual and every situation that we're in.

When we are being paranoid, we are thinking, we're convinced that something's going to harm us. And so we look at colleagues as though they're a threat. We view our friends with suspicion or jealousy.

[ 8 : 38 ] We're on guard about letting anybody get too close to us. And we can view people who are different from us as though they're dangerous.

And it's so, so easy for this to happen. We think that people are talking about us. We think that people are out to get us. And we think that people maybe that they don't like us or that something bad is going to happen.

And there's no doubt that sometimes that can be true. But very, very often it's not. And in that kind of paranoid negative mindset, we're convinced that people and circumstances are against us when all the time it's not true.

We think that there's something when there's actually nothing. And we should never forget that the Bible, the theology of the gospel teaches us two great truths that help us address paranoia.

Number one, other people aren't as bad as you think. Number two, you're not as important as you think. And so yes, sin has affected every part of life. So we believe in total depravity, but we do not believe in utter depravity.

[ 9 : 46 ] We do not believe that everybody is an absolute devil who will behave in the worst possible way in every circumstance. Common grace has left many positive characteristics in people.

People are not out to get you. And part of the reason they're not out to get you is because they're not even thinking about you. And that kind of negative paranoid mindset, very often we put ourselves at the center of the universe.

We think that everybody's behavior is shaped around what they think of us. And we're kind of we are at the center of the conversation at the staff room or the way people behave or the way people are looking at us or whatever situation it be that we're thinking about.

And I hope it's reassuring for you to hear that the Bible tells you that you're not that important. And you're actually not on people's radar in the way that you think. It's so easy to step into this trap, to think in a way that's negative and paranoid.

When that happens, we become obsessed with something that is actually nothing. And that kind of mistake, thinking is a mistake. And then the third example is anxiety.

[ 10 : 57 ] Because again, this is making something out of a nothing. Because what does anxiety feed off? What's the food for anxiety? The food for anxiety is the question, what if?

What if this happens? What if that happens? What do I do? How will I cope? And all of that's to panic over something that hasn't happened.

Now, I'm not saying that we don't care about the people that we love or that we don't worry about ourselves. That's right and that's appropriate. We do care about things, but anxiety can become crippling when it becomes irrational, when we're paralysed by the fear of what might happen.

And when we think like that, we are being crushed by something that's actually nothing. Because it's not happened. And the likelihood is that it won't.

And when we do that, we're making a mistake in our thinking. So really, really interesting example from Paul, not just in the specific example of boasting, but that principle, something that's nothing, it can really lead us to make a mistake in the way that we think.

[ 12 : 09 ] But we can also make mistakes in the way that we speak. Let me clean that up a little bit. And that's exactly the example that we have here in Galatians 6.

Paul's talking about boasting, and it's all in the context of things that people are saying. And that's such an easy mistake to fall into. And it's especially a common mistake among children.

Very often it can be related to sports or achievements. So when you'll hear kids going into do something, they'll be like, oh, I'm gonna come first, I'm gonna hammer you, I'm gonna get top marks in this test, I'm gonna be the best in my class.

And people will, and often you see children who gravitate towards thinking and speaking like that, adults can do the same. And sometimes we can speak in a way that's, you know, either very overtly or even sometimes a bit indirectly boastful.

And if we do fall into that trap of boasting, two things will happen. We'll either look really stupid if we're wrong, or we will be incredibly annoying if we're right.

[ 13 : 08 ] Either way, it has a negative effect. And there's hundreds of other examples of mistakes that we can make in our speech. The Bible addresses them all. Taking the Lord's name in vain, gossiping, being dishonest, over promising, being critical, snapping at someone, mocking someone, bullying, moaning.

They're all incredibly easy to do. They're all mistakes. And then thirdly, we can make mistakes in our actions.

Again, Paul hints towards this here. You've got to talk of works here, sorry that's not a very accurately placed circle, he's hinting us towards the way that we behave. Again, here the context is boasting.

We want to make sure that our actions actually speak much louder than our words. And so if you are really good at something, you don't need to speak about it. You can just demonstrate that by your humble actions and people will see it without you broadcasting it.

But again, there's a broader principle here. Our actions can be wise and positive, or they can be mistakes. And there's a very clear example in the letter of Galatians of actions that were mistakes, and it was all in relation to Peter.

[ 14 : 24 ] So when Cephas, that's another name for Peter, came to Antioch, Paul says, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. Peter made a mistake. And Paul explains that before certain men had come from James, Peter was quite happy to eat with the Gentiles.

But once these other guys came in, Peter drew back, separated himself, afraid of what that circumcision party would say. And then other people started to follow him. Even Barnabas was led astray.

Paul says, I saw that their conduct was not in step with the gospel. You saw that their actions were a mistake. So he said to Cephas, why are you doing this?

If you're a Jew and don't live like a Jew, why are you forcing the Gentiles to live like Jews? That was a clear example of Peter's actions that were mistaken.

He set a bad example. He made a mistake. And we can do the same in our actions. We can make mistakes about what we watch on TV, about what we read, about what we look at on our phones, about how much alcohol we drink, about how much time we spend with our families, about how willing we are to give away our possessions to others, how often we'll read and pray, how often we'll come to church.

[ 15 : 33 ] There's hundreds of examples, our thoughts, our words, our actions in all of these areas, we make mistakes. And we've got to recognise that these mistakes are mistakes.

They're not a good idea. They're not good for us. They're not good for our families. They're not good for our friendships. They're not good for our health. They're not good for our church. They're not good for our community.

There's many things that if we think them, say them or do them, we are making a mistake and we mustn't dilute that. We've got to face up to it. We've got to recognise them for what they are.

However, in saying all that, you must not let mistakes define you.

And you must not let mistakes rule over you. Why? Because mistakes are mistakes. They're not the melody of your life.

[ 16 : 37 ] They're mistakes. So imagine a tune that's written for the piano or for the bagpipes. You've got it on the sheet. You play that tune, you make a mistake. And that mistake is a mistake.

It's not part of the tune, but it doesn't actually change the tune that was written. In fact, it actually just highlights what the tune is meant to be. And it's so crucial to remember this, that as we're building a theology of mistakes, we are recognising that mistakes are real and they are serious, but they are not the final story.

They're not the main event and they're not what defines you. In fact, the whole image of a transgression, of a paraptoma, is the imagery of slipping off a path.

And that is so crucial to recognise, because it's telling you that you were made for the path. The fact that mistakes are mistakes is not telling you that you were made to fall into the ditch.

It's telling you that you were made to walk the path that God created for you. And that means that if we can understand that mistakes are mistakes, it means that they're not our masters.

[ 17 : 50 ] Your mistakes do not define you and you must never exalt them to that position where they dominate your life.

We do not exalt our mistakes. Instead, we deal with them. Or more accurately, we let the Gospel deal with them.

So, how does that happen? That takes us to addressing our mistakes. In many ways, the whole of the Gospel is about how God is dealing with our mistakes.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve made a massive mistake and humanity fell and we've been making mistakes ever since. And those mistakes loom so large over us.

If I think of childhood memories, if I think back to my school days, I mean, I was imagining being back in the classroom for the children's talk, it brings back all sorts of terrible memories.

[ 18 : 46 ] And you think back to your school days, and I don't know if you're like this, but if you're like me, if you tell me, think of a childhood memory, I will immediately think of a time when I got a row.

Oh, and I did something stupid. Those mistakes are the most vivid memories that I have of my childhood. And so often, so often that kind of shadow hangs over us.

And the culture around us tries to deal with mistakes in two ways, two fascinating ways. The most common one is to sweep them under the carpet. And so, you know, we just don't want to talk about our mistakes, we especially don't want to talk about the idea of sin.

We do not want to face up to our guilt. So very often the culture around us will just try to keep mistakes hidden. And let's just keep going with life.

Let's not think about mistakes and let's definitely not think about sin. Sometimes, though, the culture around us does the very opposite. And somebody makes a big mistake and everyone shines a massive spotlight on it.

[ 19 : 52 ] And tells the whole world to look. And the culture around us shows no mercy.

The culture we live in is either sweeping mistakes under the carpet or delighting in displaying them for everyone to see. The Gospel does neither of those things.

In the Gospel, Jesus comes as our substitute. He comes to be pierced for our transgressions, to die on the cross in our place, to take our sin upon himself and to give us his perfect righteousness as a free gift.

And all of that is possible because everybody who trusts in Jesus is united to him. So if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, you are united to Jesus.

That means that we receive the benefit of everything that he has done. Paul talks about that load. So you'll see it all through Paul's letters. He always uses that phrase in Christ.

[ 20 : 53 ] Here in Galatians, he speaks about it in a very powerful way because he actually talks about us being crucified with Christ. So just the previous chapter, those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

And then in the passage we read, he says, Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

Now there's loads of theology behind all that that we don't have time to go into. I want to highlight one key point that this is emphasizing. It's telling us that if you're a Christian or if you become one, then your mistakes are dead and buried.

Your mistakes are dead and buried. And that's so important for us to recognize because it's so easy for our mistakes to torment us. Even if we've done our very best to kind of bury them under the carpet, they still niggle at us.

We still worry that they'll come out from under the carpet again. And sometimes that happens. Sometimes we make mistakes and sometimes everybody knows and we feel so humiliated and crushed.

[ 21 : 58 ] In the Gospel, our sins are dead and buried. And that means that in God's eyes, they are totally dealt with. They're gone.

They cannot do anything to you. They cannot be held against you. And the amazing thing about the Gospel is that it doesn't just deal with our past mistakes, our future mistakes that we will make.

They are dead and buried too, all because we are united to Christ. That's why our union with Jesus is such an important truth to remember. It means that if Jesus was crucified, then so were your mistakes.

In fact, all the debt of your mistakes and mine were nailed to the cross. You were dead in test passes, in your test passes, in the circumcision of your flesh.

God made a life together with him and he forgiven us all our test passes by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

[ 23 : 01 ] The big long list of our mistakes, of your mistakes, of my mistakes is nailed to the cross. And there it lies, dead and buried, dealt with forever.

That's part of what baptism symbolizes. Our sin is washed away. It swept off us completely, never to return again.

Because Jesus died in our place. So often we make mistakes and it feels exactly like what we described in that word, translation, we've slipped off a path, we're lying in the ditch, we've totally stuffed up, Jesus says, I'm not leaving you there.

I'll never leave you in the ditch. And he restores us and forgives us and sets us on the path of discipleship as we follow him. And that's what happens to us when we come to faith, but it's also the pattern of the life of the Christian.

That's why justification, the forgiveness of our sins also leads to sanctification, the process where we become more like Jesus. That's why when we come to faith in Jesus, we don't, we come out of the ditch, but we don't think to ourselves, oh great, now my sins are forgiven, I'll just jump back into the ditch.

[ 24 : 15 ] No, we don't do that at all. That's crazy. I think I'm going to live in a new way. I'm going to leave my mistakes behind. I'm going to follow Jesus. I have a new direction, a new path, a new purpose, and by his spirit, he will lead us.

Now along the way, we stumble again and again and again, but all of those mistakes that we have made that we will make our dealt with, because if you are trusting in Jesus, your sins are dead and buried, your union with Christ is unbreakable.

And so we can summarize it all in this way. If you are, I want you to think of yourself as an unbeliever, so maybe you're here today and you think, well I know I am an unbeliever, but even if you have come to faith or you're maybe just in the middle and not sure, not that there is a middle, but you know what I mean, you feel like you're not sure, but imagine you're coming to Jesus as an unbeliever and you say to Jesus, how many mistakes have I made?

He will say far more than you realize. And that's two. We are sinners and the extent of our sin is always bigger than we are going to realize.

We've made mistakes. But in recognizing that, we come to Jesus again in faith. We trust in him. We come to him for forgiveness.

[ 25 : 38 ] And so we come to him believing, even just with that childlike faith. And when I say believe, I don't mean knowing everything. I just mean knowing that you need forgiveness and you come to Jesus. And the first time you came to Jesus, he said, how many mistakes have I made?

He says far more than you realize. Then we come to him as a believer and we ask him the same question, how many mistakes have I made? Jesus replied, I'm not counting.

They're dead and buried. And the key point is this, if you are a Christian or if you become one, when it comes to your mistakes, you need to view them how Jesus views them.

In Jesus's eyes, your mistakes are serious enough for him to die for.

And they are dealt with enough for him to forget about. Your mistakes are serious enough for him to die for.

[ 26 : 37 ] They are dealt with enough for him to forget about. And so if you are here today plagued with regret about mistakes that you've made, come to Jesus again or come to him for the first time, you do not need to stay in that ditch of regret and frustration.

Last of all, very, very quickly, responding to the mistakes in others. So often when it comes to the whole question of the gospel of following Jesus, we're plagued by the question, what if I make a mistake?

And I've heard people say that. What if I make a mistake? I don't know if I can keep it up. Or maybe you're plagued with the realization, I have made a mistake.

And maybe nobody knows, but you're like, I have completely stuffed up and I can't get past it. How should the church respond to that?

Well, this is what Paul is actually addressing in the passage that we read Galatians 6. And so often we have got this badly wrong. And I'm just, we just have to be honest about that.

[ 27 : 42 ] In our own church culture on the island, we have got this badly wrong. There are many amazing things about our church heritage here, but this is not a strong point. Because we've often created a culture where mistakes are not allowed to happen.

And so people come to church when they're feeling good or when they feel that they can at least look good. And we put on this best outward impression. We hide our insecurities and we definitely don't let anybody see mistakes.

And you kind of look on at the church and it looks like it's just all the people who are kind of together and we've got everything sorted that go along there. And it's created a culture where people think, I can only be a Christian or I can only be a member if I don't make any more mistakes.

And we've reinforced that in the church by keeping people who've made mistakes at arms length. And I want to emphasize that it's such, oh, it's just such a terrible mindset to have.

And it's so far from the gospel because it means that it means that you're in this situation where Jesus and the church that claims to follow him have two totally different approaches to mistakes.

[ 28 : 48 ] Jesus says, I know it all. I know every mistake you've made, but I forgive you. I'll restore you and I will never give up on you. There's been many times when somebody's made a mistake and the church has said, get out and stay out.

That is so wrong, so utterly wrong. Christians must never expect to receive the grace of Jesus for themselves and then deny it to the person beside them.

That's one of the basics of the gospel that what Jesus has done for us, we are going to do for others. And if our one mistake is that we're too kind, too gracious, too forgiving, oh, that's the mistake we want to make.

Because the Lord can deal with anything that we've missed. We should always default to grace, kindness and compassion because that's what the gospel shows to us.

Jesus and Jesus addresses this so beautifully because Jesus knows that mistakes are going to happen. Look at this, Galatians 1 6, if anyone is caught in any transgression, why on earth is the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write that?

[ 29 : 58 ] It's because God knows it's going to happen. He knows that we're going to get caught in transgressions. He knows that we're going to do stupid things and people are going to catch us. We're going to get found out.

We're going to make this massive mistake. And Jesus is saying that when that happens, I want you to gently restore the person who is stuffed up.

Not to put a post on social media, not to spread a wildfire of gossip, not to do some heavy decisive act of punishment, but to gently restore someone. In other words, if someone falls into the ditch, the church's job is just to help them up again.

All of that means that we are to do to others exactly what Jesus did to us. And this is where we see a really incident. I'm almost done, but I really want to say this.



At one level in church, this is the place where we want to be leaving our mistakes behind more and more. So we're wanting to learn about how to follow Jesus. We're wanting to understand what sin is, and we're wanting to grow in a lifestyle, in a mindset that is more and more like Jesus.

[ 31 : 09 ] And we wanted to be the case that in church, we're leaving mistakes behind. That's absolutely true. But at the very same time, the church should be the safest place in the whole world to make a mistake.

And that's not because mistakes are okay. It's because the people who make them are so precious.

Things run out as it always does. Our theology of mistakes is an incredibly important thing to think about. The final thing I want to say is this.

Of all the mistakes that we can make in life, we say stupid things, we think to have things, we go down a path that we regret. And everybody here, I'm sure, will think, I made a mistake when I said that, or when I didn't take that step, when I should have taken it, or whatever.

I want to say this, the biggest mistake that you can ever make is to think that Jesus can't deal with your mistakes.

[ 32 : 26 ] The biggest mistake that you can ever make is to think that Jesus can't or won't deal with your mistakes.

He will. And we can all come to him and you today. And everything that you baki will go down is king Father so he's going to die as king