

Introduction

The hymn we just sang asks a profound question. Were you and I there when the Romans and Jews crucified Jesus? Based on the passage we read, 1 Peter 2:21-24, the answer is a resounding **"Yes."** You were there and so was I and that's what I'm going to talk about tonight.

All of Us Have Sinned

Notice the term Peter uses in verse 24, **"our sins."** That term encompasses your sins and mine. As Romans 3:23 says it, all of us have sinned and fall short of God's glory.

To sin means something specific. We think, feel, or act in a way that is contrary to God's nature. His commands of course reflect His nature and reveal what thoughts, feelings, and actions violate it. In seminary, I envied the preaching ability of a student named Bill Hess. Consequently, I secretly felt glad when he struggled in Hebrew class and even told a person who praised his preaching, **"Yes, he can speak well but he certainly can't get Hebrew."** I sinned because what I felt and said was inconsistent with God's nature (His goodness) and His command that reflects it (celebrate people's gifts, Philippians 2:4).

It's true isn't it and our own persons and lives empirically prove it. All of us have sinned.

Most of Us Take Our Sins Lightly

It's also true that some of us take our sins lightly. It's remarkable really, how cavalier or casual we are about so many of our sins. We think, feel, or act contrary to God's nature and commands and yet don't feel any remorse that we did. How many times, for instance, have we gossiped about someone, gotten angry, grumbled, or sought praise and not felt guilty that we did? For some of us, it's much if not most of the time. We take our sins lightly.

There is a reasoning process behind that, even if it isn't a conscious one. Consider this. Almost no Christians would physically assault you for criticizing them. But many would verbally assault you. What's the difference? It's in the harm that's done. They perceive that the harm is great in the first (physical assault) but slight in the second (verbal assault). That's the gist of the matter. Christians take many of their sins too lightly because they think it doesn't matter that much that they did them. It's the idea, "**No harm; no foul.**" People do what I did all the time, they think, and the harm is small. So, it's no big deal. Right?

Every Sin Is a Big Deal

Wrong! It is a big deal. We see why it is in 1 Peter 2:24. That verse teaches us one of the fundamental truths of the gospel. Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross. We call that the substitutionary death of Jesus. He stood in for us. He took our place. That means two things. First, He took into Himself all of our sins. And second, He paid the penalty for those sins that we should have paid.

The implication is clear. Your sins and mine put Jesus on the cross. I don't mean in some metaphorical way but literally. Let's go back to what I felt and said about Bill Hess. Suppose that every person who ever lived never sinned. Also suppose I sinned only that once. Jesus would still have had to die on the cross – for that particular sin of mine.

That puts our sins in their larger unseen context. That context is the cross and in that context, there are no innocuous sins. Each of our sins is a big deal that matters greatly. Why? It's because it caused the ultimate harm – the death of God's Son, Jesus.

You and I must come to grips with that truth about ourselves. We must come to understand and believe it. Paradoxically, it accomplishes two opposite things when we do.

Chastens the Proud

First, it's chastens the proud. By "**the proud**" I mean those who

rely on their own goodness to be saved.

Years ago, I went door to door using the *Evangelism Explosion* method of witnessing. I remember asking one man, **"If you died tonight and God asked you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven,' what would you say?"** I'll never forget his reply, **"Because I'm a pretty good guy. I don't smoke, drink, cuss, or beat my wife."**

So many people are like that. Using one standard or another to measure it, they think they're good moral people who deserve salvation. It's the people in the gutter, the **"down and outers"** who need God's forgiveness and grace, not them.

I like the term Ravi Zacharias uses to describe people who think that way. They're **"up and outers"** and that's a good description. The reality is that those people who are **"up"** are just as **"out"** the people who are **"down"** are.

Do you know why? It's because every **"up and outer"** has something in common with every **"down and outer."** He or she was there when they crucified our Lord. It is **"up and outers"** and their sins, as much as **"down and outers"** and theirs, that caused His death.

That makes clear that there's no such thing as a good moral non-Christian. If you're apart from Jesus tonight, you need to understand that. You need God's forgiveness and grace just as much as the murderer, druggie, and thief do.

So, humble yourself and become a disciple of Jesus. You won't have abundant life now or eternal life in heaven if you don't. But you will if you do. Knowing that our sins killed Jesus chastens the proud.

Heartens the Guilty

But it accomplishes a second thing. It heartens the guilty.

I once counseled a 25 year-old man who had committed adultery with his sister-in-law. He was wracked with guilt and believed that God would never forgive him. **"After all,"** he told me, **"I was unfaithful with my sister-in-law of all people. That's as bad as you can get."**

That young man was wrong wasn't he? Committing adultery with your sister-in-law isn't **"as bad as you can get."** **"As bad as you can get"** is murdering someone who is utterly innocent, lovely, and competent, which means that all of us have done what is **"as bad as you can get."** We've done the worst possible thing that a human being can do. We and our sins murdered Jesus.

And yet when we repent, Father God forgives us for doing so. How Peter describes that in 1 Peter 2:24 is striking. By the wounds of Jesus, which we inflicted, we are healed. That is probably the greatest irony in human history. The suffering and death of Jesus, which we inflicted on Him, allow Father God to forgive us for doing just that – inflicting suffering and death on Him. He forgives us for killing His Son.

And if He forgives us for that, which is the worst thing a human being can do, He will forgive us for anything -if we repent. Notice I said **"anything"** and I meant it, which is what I told that adulterer. If Father God forgave you for that (killing His Son) then He will certainly forgive you for this (committing adultery with your sister-in-law) – if you repent.

Conclusion

I close with an observation about Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of Christ*. Many people criticized it when it came out. It will make Christians anti-Semitic, they said. But it won't those who understand what I've said tonight. The Jews, you see, weren't the only ones who killed Jesus. So did we. Were you and I there when they crucified our Lord? Yes, we were. That fact humbles the proud and heartens the guilty. So let's take both our sins and our forgiveness seriously.