"And Then There is Sin"
Sermon for 25 Sept. 2016
Texts: Galatians 2:15, 17-18; Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:1-8

In 1973 Karl Menninger published Whatever Became of Sin? He asked this question as an educated, intelligent and highly respected psychiatrist. He cites Daniel Boorstin, director of the National Museum of Science and Technology:

> "…we have lost our sense of history….lost our traditional respect for the wisdom of ancestors and the culture of kindred nations….we haunt ourselves with the illusory ideal of some "whole nation' which had a deep and outspoken "faith' in its "values.'"

In attempting to answer how this deterioration has occurred he (Menninger) says one word is missing from our analysis and that is "sin." Dr. Nelson Price, in 2008 comments on Menninger's title question with:

> " A classic example is the circumstances involving the girl in the case of Governor Spitzer of New York. Such a person was formerly called a whore. They are sometimes called hookers. The name was derived from the group of women who followed General Hooker's forces in the Civil War. Now they are referred to as call girls or preferably escorts. Menninger makes a connection between sin, guilt, and not only social ills but psychological sickness. The name of the act has changed but the consequence is still the same.
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> A foreign observer of our society describes our values as being like a display window of a store in which someone has secretly gotten into at night and changed all the price tags. The valuable items have been made to appear cheap and the cheap ones given value. Our values have been inverted. The "faith" and "values" spoken of by Boorstin have been denigrated.
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> Who is to blame? Menninger says the responsible person is identified by the central letter in the word "sin." No one sins today. We appear to have officially stopped sinning about twenty-five years ago.

Be that as it may, in Galatians 2, as read, we have two references to "sinners" and one self-reference, by Paul, to himself as a "transgressor." Furthermore, the theme of justification means a right standing before God (that standing is obtained for us by the work of Christ who obtained forgiveness for sins for us—and, by grace, that forgiveness is extended to all who believe) is threaded through the entire passage. Hence, *sin is the problem facing us.*

*"*Sin" has fallen out of our vocabulary in the culture. If as Dr. Nelson says, we stopped "sinning officially," approximately in the 1970's, we have several issues before us. On the top of the heap is the challenge to those who wish to evangelize their neighbors and associates. Follow me here, *if sin is not our core problem, then, by implication, God got it wrong in His plan of redemption, in His rescue of the human race! If we do not "sin," we do not need a Savior, we do not need an atoning sacrifice . . . and repentance is out the window as some relic of a former, religious age.* Oh, yes, vocabulary does make a

difference. The obsolescence of “sin” (for it is very apparent that people are still “sinners” regardless of the label you attach to their situation, attitude and behavior!) means we have to work harder at being understood, at presenting the plan of God to save us. Save us? From what? If we do not sin, we have no shame, no guilt, no rebellion, or wicked ways to be absolved of—we’re all okay. Except of course, those who dare to suggest that this is not how things really are, and that our “okay-ness” is either a great deception, or a delusion. I assume that everyone can see how the absence of sin connects with moral relativism, and the spurious notion that we are not supposed to be, heaven forbid, “judgmental.” The truth is that we have to be discerning and sin, properly understood and employed, helps us navigate the moral turbulence of our day successfully.

Consider, our change of vocabulary (refusing to say “sin”) does not alter the facts of history. Jesus came to save lost sinners. The parallel accounts (from Matthew 9 and Mark 2) of Jesus’ healing of a paralytic in Capernaum—either his home, or his home town, the base for his Galilean ministry—the paralytic is informed that **your sins are forgiven** (Mark 2:5; Matthew 9:2). And, in both cases, Jesus is charged with blasphemy. The current notion was that only God can forgive sins *and they had hardly conceded that Jesus was God in the flesh!* I draw your attention to the ambivalence *even in Jesus’ time* to the concept of sin, or sinning! *Our discomfort, which has resulted in our exclusion of the word from our vocabulary, has stark precedence here.* Part of the problem with sin is man’s prideful assertion that there is no such thing; that we are not morally accountable agents before a holy and offended God. If we deny our debts, we are not not indebted, right? Wrong. It doesn’t work in the financial world any more than it does in the spiritual realm wherein real transgressions occur (sins) and where God’s justice demands that they be atoned for. God apparently believes in the reality of sin, our reality as sinners and our real need to be delivered from the bondage of sin.

Paul says, **We are . . . not Gentile sinners.** He means that as Jews, he and his fellow Jews are not guilty of sinning against the law as Gentiles are through their darkness and ignorance. Gentiles sin against the law unwittingly. Jews, if they do this, do so wittingly. This brings us to an important point. If moderns assent to the reality of sin at all, they would assert that sin is a “conscious and willful act of wrong-doing, of rebellion or disobedience.” It is crucial that we sort this out because that definition is far too narrow. If we are to have any passport with the mass of addicts who surround us, we need to use “sin” more carefully. First, we must assert that because is our primary problem, it is there prior to and all around the “conscious act.” Sin is bigger than a choice, a behavior. Indeed, the greatest sin, a sin of omission, is this: that we do not love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. So, we do not worship as we ought. We do not think straight. We are not fervent, consistent or committed as worshippers.

Addiction can be framed as either a submission problem, or a lordship problem <u>and both are sin problems</u>. When we worship alcohol, or drugs, or any created, temporal thing above the Creator, we are sinning. God has commanded, **You shall have no other gods before Me.** That is not complicated. **You shall not bow down to them, or serve them.** That is pretty clear, too. When an alcoholic drinks, he is subjecting himself to his substance of choice. He does that. He bends the elbow if not the knee! What appears to be alcohol worship is, actually, a perverse example of self-worship. Some people worship other people to get what they want . . . others choose other idols such

as money, sex, power or influence. Intoxication is a state they aim to achieve through their substance of choice. This, my friends, is sin. It is real, current, definable sin that those in bondage to these gods can acknowledge and can desire to be freed from. If the scope of it seems very broad, it is—sin is reality. It is a sick heart condition—that before all else. **All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God** expresses the scope of the problem; it ropes us all in *and, consequently, it behooves us to be both humble about our own sin, and modest in our assertions of high moral standing.* For those who think too highly of themselves it is written, **Pride cometh before the fall.** (Proverbs 16:18) Take heed, those of you who believe.

Paul proceeds to say, **But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too are found to be sinners** . . . and with that he includes himself in the category of sinners. He is also asserting that the **the endeavor to be justified in Christ** is a failed enterprise. Christ does for us what it is plainly impossible for us to do for ourselves. Nothing we can do can justify us—but, praise, God, what Jesus has done does. Jesus, knowing that sin is a power that has invaded this world, a force that seeks to take-over, control, harm, enslave and destroy us took action *and defeated it on the cross!* That is to say, sin is not reducible to deliberate, conscious defiance. Sin actively seeks hurt us, enslave and degrade us—a demonic, cosmic force that God opposed by sending His Son to defeat it.

Deliverance as well as repentance and confession are weapons of warfare in the daily battle for our souls purity and direction. Therefore Jesus conferred on us the power to arrest, to repel and to defeat the power of sin, and power over all demons. **All authority in heaven and on earth has been granted to Me—go therefore.** And, not only that but also Jesus chooses to indwell those who by faith are joined to Him to insure success and give us victory. We can overcome all obstacles with His help, and through His power.

Amen