

Part 43: Sin as Breakdown of Relationship

Select a reader and begin with a time of stillness and waiting on God. Share something of your honesty in your different relationships. (20 minutes)

Sin as breakdown of relationship

The first and greatest commandment, as Jesus affirms, is that we enter into a love relationship with God. The second is that we do the same with our neighbour and with ourselves. When, through negligence or attitude on our part, we fail to love God in the manner that Luke describes, with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength and all our mind, and when we fail to love ourselves and our neighbour as we should, then we sin.

If we ALLOW a love relationship to BE LESS THAN IT COULD OR SHOULD be, we enter into sin. The reasons why we and thus our love are not perfect are obvious. We were born into a heritage of sin and grew up in the context of damaged and damaging relationships. Our response to this as Christians is to be ashamed of our failings and to seek forgiveness from those we have not loved.

We see this first consciously or outwardly. The Prayer Book confession puts it as having 'sinned . . . in thought, word and deed and in what we have left undone,' and usually this is where it ends. Little thought or reflection goes into exploring the drives and motivations which underlie our sinful actions with the result that our sins are often repeated and with time may become rationalised: 'That's just me and I can't change it.'

As caring managers to God over all that he has made us and the potential he has given us, we may leave no stone unturned in our effort to remove any obstacles to our love.

Sin as conditional love

Love involves total acceptance, affection, care, concern and commitment and only operates in the present tense. If I place any conditions on my love, it is not love.

I cannot say I will love you 'if you first put things right', as this condition denies love. Love may well grow as I get to know and understand you more, but any conditions placed on the other are a form of manipulation.

Sin as expectations

Placing any expectations on one we are trying to love, whether it be ourselves, God or another, robs that one of the freedom to be who they are. Expectations are a subtle form of control that one may impose and so leave the other less free.

What makes expectations unhealthy is that they are largely undisclosed. We presume that others see and feel in the same way that we do and thus that the demands that seem normal and reasonable to us would seem that way to them too. We may feel silly to be making an issue of these things by talking about them, and so we leave them closed. Our sense of disappointment when someone does not live up to our expectations damages our openness to them.



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In other words, expectations are the anticipation of what seems fair or reasonable to expect from the other, but they are seldom voiced or agreed upon. If they are not met, our disappointment leaves the other having failed rather than leaving them free to become their own true selves.

The same applies to ourselves. Placing high expectations on ourselves is a sure sign of a distorted relationship of love and acceptance of oneself.

Blame: Sin as avoidance of responsibility

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus makes it clear that the priest and the Levite who walked by the wounded traveller were disobedient to the command to love their neighbour. They had no choice of whom to love as neighbour, but had the responsibility to love whomever they came across. This implies that we have a specific responsibility to love anyone who comes across our path or whom we find to be part of our lives. This includes accepting and loving who and what we are. Anything short of this is sin.

This personal responsibility which we all carry can be eroded or 'given' over to others so that one is then left 'free' to act as one wants. One simply blames the others when one has failed. Eve blamed the serpent and Adam blamed Eve when they sinned.

So often we blame our lack of love on circumstances (our parents, our community, our government etc.) over which we apparently have no control. Our given circumstances are the environment in which we are to love, the very situation which needs our loving involvement. Waiting for circumstances to change is again avoiding our responsibility to love where we are.

The mystery of our being 'in God' is that nothing falls outside of God's influence. So our response is to have a quality of love in all our involvements. Reflect on your own sin in the way you love. Look specifically for any attitudes in you that justify this compromised love. (20 minutes)

Share in the group as appropriate.

During the week

In your times with God, reflect and pray through your different relationships and on the way you are managing them. What expectations do you have of others and of yourself? Ask God what expectations he has of you.



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