

JAMES RESHUFFLED, So What's Sin?
April 29, 2018

I'm sure you've noticed that there are words you hear at church on Sunday
that you'd never hear at work on Monday? (And visa versa LOL)

Amen; Hallelujah; Sanctification; Carnal Christian; Fellowship; Repentance; Blessed . . .

The irony, is that when those words came off the pen of the NT writers,
they were words of the common square that anyone on the street would understand.

When we use these words 2,000 years later either we:
fail to connect with listeners because we're using word that no longer communicate,

OR, because the very concept behind those words has gone out of vogue
One such word is – SIN.

How many of you heard the word SIN at work this week?
Did anyone of you students get called to the principal's office to talk about your *sin*?
Did any of you get pulled over by a police officer and get a *sin* violation?
Did you go before a judge and get thrown in jail because of your many *sins*?

We just don't use the word; it feels so degrading.

When Nico doesn't brush his teeth when I tell him to, I don't say,
Nico, you sinned. You're a sinner.
I just wouldn't do that.

Instead of sin, we say things like:

I made a mistake
I misspoke
I misbehaved

But, I sinned?
Because I'm a sinner?
So harsh sounding.

Yet, on the other hand, when someone wrongs me,
lies to me; betrays me; steals from me, tongue lashes me.
If they say, "Oh, I made a mistake," it just doesn't cut it.

A mistake is something you do on a math test, or maybe your income tax,
This feels bigger than . . . a mistake.

A *mistake* means you had insufficient knowledge.
When you discover you've made a mistake, you correct it.
But what if you make a mistake on purpose?
Is that still a mistake?
When someone makes a 4-year long mistake.
Is it really a mistake?
Sometimes we plan our mistakes.
Some people may have a stash of mistakes hidden in the house.
What if we've made plans so that you can make our next mistake.
Can you make a pre-meditated a mistake?

At some point we've gotta admit that whatever's going on,
is bigger than a mistake.
There's something wrong with ME, in here.
And it's damaging my relationships.
and saying, "I made a mistake," isn't fixing things.

The wonderful thing about the BOOK is that it gives us a name for this something in me
that's broken and damaging my relationships. It's called SIN.
And that's actually GOOD NEWS!

Let me illustrate:
Have you ever gone to the doctor because you know that something is wrong.
If he says, "I can't find anything wrong. It must just be stress,"
which is code for, (eye rolling) "It's all in your head."
Everything in you says, "No! There's something wrong!"
(Like the gravestone that read, "I told you I was sick.")

Finally, you find a doctor who finds the problem and says, "You have _____."
It's a strange moment of bad news relief at the same time!

That's what God, the great Physician, has done for us.
He gives us the diagnosis that rings true.
And once you've got a diagnosis you can begin working on the cure.
You've got SIN!
A BIG word, for a BIG problem.

As the Apostle Paul observes, "There's something wrong with me." Romans 7

I don't do the things I want to do,
and I end up doing the things I don't want to do.

Aha!

That's SIN dwelling in me.

Me, the one who wants to do good.

Oh, wretched man that I am.

Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

There is no pathway to peace with God or in our relationships

if we can't own the gravity of our sin.

Mistakers aren't forgiven and restored; sinners are,

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

But now let's say you went to the doctor and found out you've got _____!

What probably would you do?

We'll I'd google everything I could about this disease. *Just what is it?*

Well this morning, we're going to a more reliable source than google for this diagnosis.

We're going to the BOOK of James to ask, "*So What's Sin?*"

I hope I can rock your world this morning.

James, like the other New Testament writers,

like Jesus himself, is going to make understanding sin extremely easy.

He boils sin down to the violation of just one law.

James 2:8

The royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

That's it. Startling.

Certainly, James is going to spend time in his letter illustrating what a violation
of the ONE Royal Law of Love looks like in his church,

But what's more startling in all of his illustration is what he doesn't do.

James DOESN'T carry in a long list of do's and don'ts,

like the 613 laws found in the Old Testament.

Where does James get this idea? Right out of the playbook of Jesus.

As Jesus is giving his parting instructions to the disciples he says,
John 13:34 **A new commandment I give you: Love one another.**
As I have loved you, so also you must love one another.

The Apostle Paul? Exact same thing.

Galatians 5:15

**For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command:
“Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

At first, we say, “You can’t be that simple. Just one Royal LAW?
BUT this ONE Royal law is far more difficult.

It means we have to be deeply aware of other people

and the effect our decisions and actions are having on them.

It means we have to wrestle to discern the heart and will of God in new situations.

It means we have to constantly be asking God for wisdom.

Let me show you what this looks like in real time.

We journey back to about 48 AD, about 15 years after the resurrection of Jesus.

All these Greeks and Romans (who the Jews called Gentiles)
are becoming enthusiastic Jesus followers.

But – they’re *not* living according to the Laws of God – spelled out in the Bible!

(The OT is the ONLY Bible they had for the first couple hundred years)

The Jewish believers didn’t know what to do with these new Jesus followers.

Should we give them all rights and privileges of law-abiding believers?

The most highly charged issue was if new male believers needed to be circumcised.

What was terribly objectionable to one group was equally objectionable to the other.

This emotionally charged controversy was threatening to split the church.

So the key leaders of the church got together in Jerusalem to sort this out

in what has come to be known as the Council of Jerusalem. (Acts 15)

And guess who was leading the assembled group? James

Now here’s what’s *so* interesting

This could have been simply a question of, “Well, what does the *Bible* say?”

And the Bible had lots to say . . .

Gen 17:10-14 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised . . . and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner - those who are not your offspring. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

Exodus 12:48

"An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land.

That's what the Bible says, as clear as day,
and I'm sure that many of the Jewish believers were making that very case.
But in the final decision, listen to what you *won't* hear
You won't hear, "Well, the Bible says _____, and that settles it."

James and the other leaders understood that there was a new covenant afoot,
and the laws that God put in place for one culture at one time
were *not* rigidly applicable for all cultures in all times.

They knew they had wrestled to find the heart of God in this new culture and new time.
The question was not, "What does the *Bible* say" . . . BUT RATHER
What does love of God and love of neighbor look like in this new situation?

So James leaders came up with some rules for to guide the new diverse church.
That would allow this diverse group of believers
with very different opinions of what was right and wrong behavior
to live together in peace.

Acts 15:28-29

We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.
For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us,
to lay upon you [the Gentiles] no greater burden than these necessary things:

- that you abstain from things offered to idols,
- from blood,
- from things strangled,
- and from sexual immorality.

If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

(I'm sure the new believing Gentiles were quite happy with this decision.)

But what I really want you to notice is the *basis* on which this decision was made.

For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us

They were acting as responsible moral agents in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

But now come with me a few years down the line.

One of their instructions you will recall,

was that the people should abstain from things offered to idols.

Was *that* now the new law for all time and place?

Those who *thought* so, were understandably upset when they discovered

that some of the people in *their* church were eating this meat.

Now it's Paul's turn to have an emotionally intense fight on his hands.

What does Paul say?

Since idols are only inanimate object and not gods,

then meat that was offered to them is

neither intrinsically good or intrinsically bad.

So, if you can buy and eat it with a clear conscience, go ahead.

BUT if you can't do it with a clear conscience,

Because you believe it dishonors God,

don't do it, because for you it would be sin.

You mean, a behavior that is sin for one person isn't necessarily sin for another?

AND there's more.

If you can do it with a clear conscience (so it wouldn't be sin for you),

but your fellow believer can't do it with a clear conscience,

then go out of your way not to offend them.

And be sure you never do anything that would encourage anyone

to violate their conscience,

because then you'd be responsible for making *them* sin.

Sin wasn't in the particular *action*, but in a violation of one's conscience.

Is this a new thought for you?

Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:10-13

For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge

(that it's not a sin), eating in an idol's temple,

won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols?

So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died,

is destroyed by your knowledge (your freedom).

When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience,

you sin against Christ.

Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin,

I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

So, while it wasn't a sin to eat meat that had been offered to idols,

It *was*, however, a sin to violate your own conscience

or to cause someone else to violate their conscience.

Romans 14:23

Whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith;

and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Come back to James.

He echoes the exact same thing:

James 4:17

If anyone then knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

So if you believe something to be wrong, and do it anyway,

for you that is sin because you can't do it in faith.

And, if there is something you know you *should* do, and you don't do it,

for you that is sin.

And if you encourage another to violate their conscience,

then you both will have sinned.

Are you beginning to see why sin can't be reduced to a list of behaviors?

I know this is boat-rocking for some of you.

But if we don't get this right,

We may end up putting heavy burdens on some that God never intended

That will block their way into the kingdom of God.

And we will let others off scot free whose behavior lines up,

but whose hearts are far from the Royal law of love.

Think about it?
If the Council of Jerusalem hadn't got this right,
We'd not be here worshipping today.

I know many of you say, Wow, this is a slippery slope.
You won't be the first to feel this way.

They certainly accused the Apostle Paul of being too loosey-goosey about sin.
If you tell people they are no longer obligated by our list of behaviors, but are under grace,
it'll be anything goes!

Paul's response? [Shall we sin that grace may abound? May it never be!](#)

Jesus and Paul and James aren't lowering the standards.
They were raising them higher than they'd ever been before.

Consider adultery, for example.
Love couldn't deceive or betray the other.
Love couldn't indulge its own passions and desires
at the expense of someone else's dignity.

Or consider the murder.
Love could not only not take another life,
Love couldn't even harbor hate toward another.
Love couldn't even diminish the other with harsh and degrading tongue lashes.

As James says, the Royal law of love brings glorious freedom, Yes!
But also tremendous responsibility.

I can do all things, but not all things are profitable
I can do all things, but not all things I can do in faith
I can do all things, but not all things are an expression of love.

So – the conclusion to the matter is this.
There is no path to peace in our relationships, in our homes, in NB or in our world,
until we *own* the gravity of our SIN, and
There is no path to peace in our relationships, in our homes, in NB or in
until we understand sin as a violation of the Royal Law of Love

Once this really sinks in,
we will know why we need nothing less the very heart of God,
transforming us from the inside out.