



AWARENESS OF **SIN**

God always seems to get our attention. Whenever I think I'm doing fine handling life on my own, somehow, somehow, He manages to show up and force me to deal with my sin. He's like a full-length mirror that follows us around from room to room. We can ignore it for a while, but eventually we are forced to take a close look and see every flaw and blemish—all the ways we don't measure up to His perfect standard, the law.

That mirror of God's holiness can take a couple of different forms. As my view of God expands, so will my awareness of sin. He will use multiple means to show me my sin. He will expose my unbelief through His **Word** (Romans 3:20), through the

Holy Spirit (John 16:8-9), and through the **community of faith** (Galatians 6:1).

But what is it we are actually seeing in this mirror? If you were to write a definition of sin, what would you say? When I was a teenager, I had a youth pastor who challenged us to go a whole day without sinning. I look back and now realize that he had a very small definition of sin. For him, sin was all about actions. His definition included a lot of “behavioral” words that communicated “not measuring up,” “falling short,” “disobedience,” “rebellious against God,” etc.

Sin is about more than just behavior. We sin because we are sinful.

We prefer thinking about sin in terms of behavior/performance/actions. It’s easier that way. It allows me to do two things: I can focus on specific sins and “deal with them.” Then when I have cleaned up that area of my life, I can move on and work on something else. It keeps things nice and tidy, not messy and overwhelming.

Second, if I focus on sin as only a set of behaviors, then it gives me a justified way of puffing myself up. I can usually turn around and find someone who is more messed up than I am. What a relief! Besides, if actions and performance are the only measure, then honestly, some days I do okay. You could follow me around and you would see me interacting with friends, spending time with my kids, taking care of my family, and serving others. If sin is just bad behavior, then some days I’m doin’ mighty fine!

But sin is about more than just behavior. Our sinful behaviors flow out of sinners' hearts. We sin because we are sinful. The danger of focusing only on the external actions is that as long as we maintain a small view of sin, then we will believe in a small cross and a small Jesus. It's a convenient way to keep Him at arm's length.

The result of the fall is not only that we are separated from God, but that we are also corrupt—tainted through and through. Even our best efforts are still marred by sin.

Let's pretend I am offering you a piping hot, melt-in-your-mouth Ghirardelli chocolate brownie with added chocolate chips (yum!). There's just one catch. Right before I give it to you, I put a drop of cyanide on the corner. Just a drop. You know exactly where it is, so you can eat around it. Would you eat it? Probably not. For a large amount of money? Maybe. You might convince yourself that you could break off that corner and still be able to eat a portion of the brownie from the opposite side without being hurt by the cyanide.

That's kind of how we often view our sin. *It has just corrupted a piece of us; a corner of my heart, but not the whole thing.* If I am diligent enough I can, with surgical precision, remove the parts that are corrupted by sin while the rest remains unscathed. What an inaccurate view! This view of sin keeps it manageable. Not only can I compartmentalize it, but it allows me to compare myself with others—and gloat.

A better analogy would be this: imagine that deliciously thick brownie mixture before it gets poured into the pan.

While it is in the bowl, I add some cyanide, stir it in, and then bake the brownies. Would you eat them now? No way! The risk is simply too great. The batter has been completely corrupted by the cyanide, and it has worked its way into the entire brownie. Even with surgical precision, there would be no way to extract only the contaminated areas.

This is what we are up against in our battle with sin. Sin has infiltrated and corrupted every aspect of our hearts. There is no area that has escaped the damaging effects of the fall. We are completely tainted with sin. It's not just that a part of me is sinful, and so I sin. *I sin because I am sinful*. Sin is so much more than just behavior.

Romans 1 gives us a pretty detailed picture of just how deep the rabbit hole goes, and verses 28–32 (NIV-1984) point out how desperate we are outside of Christ:

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Although any definition of sin would include a list of behaviors like those in this passage, sin goes much deeper than what we do. If we miss this, then we put ourselves on a path that will continually keep the beauty of the gospel of grace *just out of reach*.

Romans 14:23 gives us an even broader definition of sin: “Everything that does not come from faith is sin.” This is a game changer. It challenges my definition of sin and expands it to include all of my unbelief. The reality is that *all* sin is rooted in unbelief. We are constantly bumping up against the wall of our unbelief and lack of trust in the gospel.

Our unbelief shows up everywhere, such as when I

- *listen to lies that say that I'm not lovable*
- *believe that a promotion will solve my problems*
- *turn to food, alcohol, prescription drugs, or pornography to numb my pain*
- *work harder to earn God's favor*
- *use excessive dieting and exercise to satisfy deeper cravings*
- *need others to “need me” in order to feel loved*
- *have to control people and circumstances*
- *can't say no for fear of letting others down*
- *am anxious*
- *am critical of others*
- *look in the mirror and hate what I see*
- *demand perfection from my children*
- *live for the approval of others*
- *beat myself up over my failure*

CRAVING GRACE

Our unbelief is ever-present, and so often we don't even realize it. It shows up in the choices we make, the idols we construct, and the perspectives we have on our circumstances. This brief list is just the beginning.

In the same way the gospel **changes** everything, our unbelief **corrupts** everything. I love how Paul David Tripp describes the beauty of being made aware of our sin and unbelief. He says, "Accurate self-assessment is the product of grace. It is only in the mirror of God's Word and with the sight-giving help of the Holy Spirit that we are able to see ourselves as we actually are."² Until we see ourselves clearly, we will never understand the sweet gift of grace we have been given.