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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“Man in His Fall part II, or The Nature of Sin in Man, part I”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, again we turn to Thee with praise and thanksgiving for the word of God. We thank Thee that it is a light unto our feet to direct us in the darkness of this world. We thank Thee for the blessings that have come to us through it, and we particularly thank Thee that Thou hast, through the Holy Spirit, brought us through the word to the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. And we pray, Lord, that as we study the Scriptures again tonight, and think about the teaching of the word of God and from other spheres of this world that is Thine, we pray that we may be guided into the truth. And may our studies be profitable to us, both theoretically, doctrinally and practically. We commit the hour to Thee.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well, we are continuing our series of studies in anthropology and hamartiology, or the doctrine of man and the doctrine of sin. And our topic tonight is “Man in His Fall”, and this is the second in this small series within the larger series, or “The Nature of Sin in Man”. And we will at least be on this same small topic, limited topic, next Tuesday night also.

So let’s turn to Genesis chapter 3 and let me read a few more verses of this great chapter on the Fall of Man. Beginning at verse 7, and we shall conclude at verse 13, and I want, in a few moments, to make a few comments on this section before we launch into our subject. Verse 7,

“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves loin coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him; where are you? And he said; I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself. And he said; who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? And the man said; the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree and I ate. Then the Lord God said to the woman; what is this you have done? And the woman said; the serpent deceived me and I ate.”

“Man in His Fall, or The Nature of Sin in Man”. In simple terms, the Bible claims that man was created holy in the image of God, that he disobeyed God, that he became by that, what we now see him to be; in moral wreck and ruin. And that is really the story of Genesis chapter 2 and the first six verses of Genesis chapter 3. Created holy, man disobeyed God, as a result man fell, and what we see of man today about us is the result of the fall in the Garden of Eden.

A few years ago, one outstanding professor of theology in the United States, Professor Richard Niebuhr, was speaking in Washington D. C. in a theological discussion group, and he said that, “In his opinion, there are two common ways of understanding man which are current among us. And one is through the myth of the fall of Adam, and

the other is through the myth of *pithecanthropus erectus*.” And he thus brought into opposition, the biblical doctrine of the fall of Man, which for him, was the myth of the fall of Man. And also, the evolutionary view of man, which is the common view of most of our scientists today. “The one”, he went on to say, “was tenth century B. C. within the 3rd chapter of Genesis.” Now, it should be a great deal more than tenth century B. C., but that was his date. “And the other has to do with our ancestry.” And he asked the question, “Which is true?” Now, he went on to say that, “You could liken these two views of man to the Coliseum in Rome, and to a ranch house out west.”

Now, I thought it was interesting that tonight on the news at 5:30, I saw a picture of the Coliseum, and was told by the news commentator that the Coliseum is now going to be of limits for awhile to all tourists in Rome, because it’s falling to pieces. And consequently, they’re going to engage in some kind of repair work to make it seeable again. But we have all seen pictures of the great Coliseum in the city of Rome, and the thing that impresses you is, not only that it must have been a great public amphitheater, but it is now in wrack and ruin. And while the walls are standing, that’s just about all that is standing. And so you get the picture of something that must have been very wonderful in its day, but today it’s just only a ruin of what it once was.

That’s one view of man, and that in a sense, is the biblical picture of man. Now, Professor Niebuhr went on to say, “The other view is like a ranch house, for in a ranch house, and you can tell that he made these comments about fifteen or twenty years ago when ranch houses were very popular and particularly out here in the west. Ranch houses are one story houses on which people often build additions, and they start out small and they are beautifully adapted to adding a room here, or adding a den here, or adding another room there, or adding a work room here. And that’s the evolutionary view of man.” Well, I guess that might be a good illustration of these two competing viewpoints. By one, man is getting more significant and better and better as the days go

by, as he evolves out of his past. And the other, is the view that man once in the knowledge of God, but now because of the fall, lies in ruins.

With this view both some evolutionary anthropologists and some philosophers would disagree, but these are generally speaking, the competing viewpoints. Surprisingly, some of the former, that is, evolutionary anthropologists, feel that man evolved into his violence. Now, just this week, I’m not sure that I can really tell you everything that I read, but just this week in *Psychology Today*, I read an article by Louis Leakey, one of our best known anthropologists, and Robert Ardrey who is one of our best known – I’ve forgotten what he is actually. [Laughter] But he is an ethologist. That’s why I forgot it, ethologist. It’s an interesting discussion, and the discussion is on “Man, the Killer”. And the anthropologist is discussing with the ethologist the sources of violence in human nature. It is the opinion of Leakey that “Man’s violence is to be traced to the leisure time that he enjoys, produced by the invention of fire, language, thought, religion and magic.” That according to his views, man was perfectly all right until he managed to develop to the place where he had leisure time and then, in having leisure time, he began to think up all of these things that have resulted in violence. He also said that, “He had never seen primates competing for food, and that he felt that in the beginning, there was not this competition among men, and therefore no violence.” He strikingly, like I said, “Evolution is really a gigantic faith structure.” He wound up the article by saying, “What we need is faith that everything is going to be all right in the end, in spite of what we see about us today.”

Now, Ardrey disagreed with him. He said, “Now, if you go back and think about those old men that you are so familiar with, you’ll remember that Peking Man or Homo erectus was a headhunter and a cannibal.” And then he listed a number of other things which seemed to dispute Leakey’s views. Then in the conclusion, Leakey suggested that “Really, the switchboard of the human brain is not yet installed, and that really is our problem; that basically we have a reptilian brain in the inmost being of our brain, and

wrapped around that, is a mammalian brain, and then the immense cortical development of the human brain around that. But unfortunately, the connections have not yet been made.” And so that was his illustration, “The switchboard of the brain is not yet installed, and consequently, some of those ideas and thoughts that come from the reptilian brain at the heart of our human brain are responsible for the things that men do.”

This comes, as I mentioned before, from the idolatry of artifacts. We look back and we see the things that ancient man discovered, that ancient man used in his life, and we say, “Ah, ancient man was nothing but a brute and a savage.” And we forget, as I mentioned the other night that ancient man has made all of the most significant discoveries with the exception of chloroform. That it was ancient man who discovered fire, language, invented these things, the greatest things that we have. And this brute, this savage that was originally here on the earth is responsible, humanly speaking, for these things. And so the idea that the first men were brutes and savages and cave dwellers is thoroughly contrary to what we know. Science really doesn’t tell us anything about ancient man. It cannot tell us anything about ancient man.

Well granted then that the fall occurred and that man in history now is man who has fallen, how did man accomplish it? What happened? What is responsible for this ruin of a man that we see? Well, let’s turn to this Genesis account, and I want to tonight if possible, suggest a few more reflections on the Genesis account, and then we want to look specifically tonight at the philosophical theories of sin. And I want to seek to try to answer these views that men have concerning the nature of sin, and that will lead on up to, I hope, a clear picture of what the Bible has to say about sin.

Well last time, we looked at Genesis 3:1 through 6, and we saw that as a result of the temptation by Satan, man fell. What God had said, “That in the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” Well, it is evident that Adam did not die physically. So consequently, that text must have reference to Adam’s spiritual death. So at the moment that sin entered into the heart of Adam death began to work. The human spirit which

had been in control of his human organism under God now was no longer in control of his human body. The laws of nature which are imposed by God upon sinning man began to take over, and Adam’s spirit was no longer able to control him, so that from that moment on, he must walk in the way of pain. He must walk in the way of senility, and ultimately, he must walk in the way of death. For God had said, “For you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Adam had to learn a very, very important principle, which you and I, even today, have to learn. And that is that God has certain laws which are his primary laws for us, and if we disobey these laws then we are subject to certain lower laws, which we have to obey, whether we like it or not.

Let me give you an illustration. This is like Hooker’s conception of law. He said, “For example, you’re walking down a street, and it’s a very slippery street, and so you do not observe the primary law of prudence. You will find that you will be observing the secondary law of gravitation, and you will fall.” Now, this is true in so far as human nature is concerned, because God has given us certain principles in the word of God, and if we will not obey them, then we will obey some secondary principles, which we must obey. And so Adam, because he did not respond to his environment in the way that God intended for him to respond finds now that he must die. And so the moment that he sinned, death entered into his heart and he walked in the way of human pain, of senility, of sickness and finally, death. So the human spirit is no longer master of the body of Adam. As a matter of fact, Adam is like a man who has come to lodge in his house, and he finds himself now subject to the house which is about him. So man, as a result of the fall is a spoiled species. The mind, the emotions, the will are all affected, and we will see that, I think, later on.

Looking at our text now, notice the things that Moses stresses. He says, “Then the eyes of both of them were opened.” Now in verse 5, Satan had said, “For God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened.” Well, Satan told the truth. Their eyes were opened. Verse 22, “Then the Lord God said; Behold, the man has

become like one of us, knowing good and evil.” And so man’s eyes were opened indeed, but he was unable to do anything about it. He now knows what sin is in experience, but he unable to deliver himself from the sin. And so he knows, but he’s helpless in his knowledge. He’s like a man who’s sick, and his doctor comes in, who has far more knowledge of the sickness than he has, but it’s theoretical. He has the practical knowledge, and he’s suffering as a result of it. And Adam now has the knowledge of good and evil, but unfortunately, he is unable to do anything about his sad condition. Moses continues, “And they knew that they were naked.” Physically they were naked, but spiritually they were naked also, in the shame of sin and guilt. And it is evident that they have, as a result of this experience of recognizing their physical nakedness; recognize too that there is a spiritual nakedness. For we read, “They knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.” So the glory of holiness is gone. Adam is naked and he knows he’s naked. And furthermore, he’s ashamed of his nakedness, and so he seeks to cover himself.

I’ve often commented on the fact that it’s very striking that Jesus Christ died on the cross naked. They remove his garments, remember, the Roman soldiers, and cast lots for them. The reason that Jesus Christ had to die naked of the cross is that he has to bear all of the judgment for our sin, not only the spiritual death and the physical death, but even the shame for sin. And so in the typical way, Jesus bears all of sin, its guilt, its pollution, and its consequences, all of the guilt of that. And so Jesus Christ dies naked, just as the first man became naked in his sin. Then it says, “And they sewed fig leaves together.” This is a pathetic human expedient. The first religion of good works. Here it is; the attempt to cover our own sin, and our sense of guilt and pollution. This instinct of shame and desire to cover is confirmed by God. That is, the sense of shame that Adam felt, and the sense of a need for a covering, God in a sense confirms because in a few moments, he will slay an animal, and he will give Adam and Eve covering from the animal. And so this feeling that came over Adam that he must have some covering is a genuine feeling.

Now the garments of human religion are always uncomfortable and fig leaves are surely one of the most uncomfortable garments that anyone could possibly have. If you have a fig tree in your back yard like I have in my yard, and you take down some of those leaves and just feel those leaves, and Adam must have felt terrible in his equivalent of Hart, Shaffner and Marx clothes, because fig leaves are itchy, creepy, crawly, scratchy in feeling. That’s the only way I know to describe them, but that is his attempt to cover himself.

Now, Moses continues, “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God, among the trees of the garden.” They have this sense of exposure to judgment, and so when the judge comes down into the garden, they wish to hide themselves. This reaches its climax in history when, in the last days during the Great Tribulation period, when it becomes evident that God is going to come again the second time in the person of our Lord to establish peace on the earth. Remember that those who are disobedient in those days, seek to hide themselves from the Lamb who sits on the throne, and they call upon the rocks and the caves to fall upon them and cover them, or hide them. And so they hid themselves because they sensed that they were exposed to judgment. Well, God came and we read in verse 9 that he said to them, “Where are you?” His first word to fallen man is a word of love and grace.

Now, this is very different from Bill Cosby’s interpretation of what happened on the Garden of Eden. He said that, “When Adam and Eve sinned, God came down into the garden and he said; All right, everybody out of the pool.” That’s quite a bit different from this. God comes down with his word of grace, “Where art thou?” or “Where are you?” And now we’ll notice that the man and the woman run in the age-old path of self-vindication. Each one wants to vindicate themselves. Selfishness is really a product of sin, and we’ll talk about that in a few moments, but it is a product of sin. And you can sense it in the way in which they reply to God’s question, “Where are you?” And so Adam says in the 10th verse, “I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid

because I was naked, so I hide myself.” Now, notice the progression. He was naked, and he was afraid, and so he hid himself. So you can just see the progression. He feels the fact that he is exposed to judgment, and he’s fearful because of that. And so in order to escape, he hides. Now, this answer, this first answer that Adam gives conceals the cause, but here he blurts out really, what’s the truth of the matter. Now, when God questions him further, we’ll notice who he blames. And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? And the man said; the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree and I did eat.” And so Adam blames his wife.

Will Rogers said, “That American history could be divided into two eras, the era of the passing of the buffalo, and the era of the passing of the buck.” So, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree and I did eat.” Now, just think for a moment what this really means. What this means is that Adam, instead of looking at the situation as it really is, that he has been disobedient, “willfully disobedient” the New testament tells us, for he was not deceived as Eve. He seeks to blame her. So what he is really saying, in the final analysis, is that this situation is something that you cannot blame him for.

Now, you have seen men, and you yourself have participated in this same type of thing. Now, when God in a sense, puts the finger upon us, we look at ourselves, and we find all kinds of reasons why we are to be excused because of our disobedience. For example, we may say, “Well, this one cursed passion that I have. It’s something that is part of me. It’s part of Lewis Johnson, and there’s nothing I can do about it. I was born with it.” Or, “This tremendous appetite I have which I cannot control, this one blemish in my character. The fact that I am by nature, envious. Really, that’s the way I was made. And so I cannot really be blamed for that.” Or, “I’m jealous by nature, or I have passions of sex that I cannot control, or I’m furiously ambitious. I want to be at the top of the ladder. It’s just the way I’m created. And so this one thing lies in my heredity, or in my

environment in which I grew up, and its constitutional character was given to me, and really there is nothing that I can do about it. In the final analysis, I didn’t choose my parents. I didn’t choose my genes. I didn’t choose my blood. And so surely, if there is a God, he understands the fact that I cannot control this.” And the tragic poets, as someone has said, and the environmental theorists, and the sociologists, and the students of heredity, and even some jurists come and they all blow the same horn. And really, all of our troubles are to be related to these things.

And what is the final result of all of this? Well, the final result of it is, my Christian friend, is that it is God who finally must sit in the dock. It is he who is being judged finally. We are saying really, “It all is God’s fault.” And that’s what we’re really saying and so, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me.” You see, it’s really God who is responsible for this.

Now, the woman is not a great deal different. She did tell the truth, and so when the Lord said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” She said, “The serpent deceived me and I ate.” Now, that was true. The serpent did deceive her. In fact Paul said, “She was utterly deceived.” She just went into a complete tailspin when Satan began to tempt her, which I presume from the context of 1 Timothy, means that it’s a dangerous thing for women to be involved in the teaching of biblical doctrine. Now, this does not mean, mind you, that women cannot know Bible theology. I look out over this audience, and I certainly hope all of you learn some Bible doctrine, but there are certain things that God has put into the hands of men because he created men with certain responsibilities. And there are certain things that he hath put in your hand, which you can do far better than we poor, frail, masculine men can do. And apparently, biblical doctrine is one of the things that the females cannot handle too well. And so if you want to know something, Paul says, “Ask your husband at home.” He says, “I suffer not a woman to usurp to teach, or to usurp authority over a man.” And then he goes on to say, “For in the Garden of Eden, the woman was utterly deceived.” Adam, he went in with his eyes wide open. He

saw. He’s just as much a sinner, but his sin was not the sin of being deceived. His sin was a sin of just willfulness, and I’m willing to blame him more, but I nevertheless, think that when Eve said that she was deceived by the serpent, there is a lesson for us in this.

Now, that is why I do not believe that in Christian churches we should have women elders. That is why because into elders’ hands in the word of God, are committed the oversight of the Church of God, and to their hands is committed the ministry of the word of God. It is their responsibility to feed the flock, and in their hands is the responsibility for the teaching. Now, I think that’s proper, and if you want to shoot me down in flames because I’m such a male chauvinist pig, all right. That’s where I stand, and I really do believe that with all my heart.

On the other hand, I think that, as I said, those other areas of life which are just as important, are areas in which the women have not only full responsibility, but God has given you the kind of capacity to carry them out in such a way that we could not. A woman’s place in the Bible, to put in our common language, is in the home, raising a family, and giving herself to that home; to her husband, to her children. And the greatest work that they can do is right there.

So, “The serpent deceived me and I ate.” Now, notice the order in which God speaks to the man, the woman, and the serpent. It’s the serpent first, and then it’s the woman, and then it’s the man. And that would seem to indicate to me, a degree of responsibility. It is the serpent first; the tool of Satan. Then it is the woman, and for the climactic judgment, he reserves Adam because it is Adam who is the head of the human family. Now, so one blames the other, then they blame the serpent.

Well then, let’s look now at the scriptural nature of sin in the light of what we have seen here. If the USA knew the truth of Genesis chapter 3, then she would not be the dupes of the world’s war lords. There is a remarkable parallel between the Roman Empire’s dealings with Carthage in the Third Punic War, and the present situation. You may remember something about your ancient history, but just before the Third Punic War,

Carthage had become very prosperous. They were very peaceful. They didn’t want to fight Rome, but Rome was anxious to control the world, and as a result of this, they engaged in all types of Cold War strategy with reference to Carthage. They included: war by proxy, deception, propaganda, subversion, terror, blackmail, psychological warfare, inducements to unilateral disarmament, and hostages. All of these things were practiced by the Roman Empire in connection with Carthage. Now, if that does not sound like an analysis of the present day situation, I don’t know what does. And if the United States recognized the character of the heart of man, what it really is as a result of the fall, then we would be extremely careful in the way that we deal with some of the nations of this earth who are, it seems to me, enemies of our country.

Looking now at the philosophical theories of sin, and I’m going to only mention the five that are here. There are other theories of sin, but these are theories of sin we often read in our newspapers. If you will just bear in mind these things, and then as you read the newspaper and read other literature, you will discover that these theories, while ancient theories, theories in one sense, are also just as modern as 1972. One of them is that sin is an eternal principle of evil. Now, this is a dualistic view because according to this view, God is eternal and the principles of goodness flow from God from eternity, but sin is also an eternal principle of evil. The spirit of man is derived from the kingdom of light, and the body and its life, from the kingdom of darkness. The spirit of man is related to God who is eternal in his goodness. The body of man is related to this eternal principle of evil, and the body is the place where evil dwells. So sin, according to this theory, is really something of a physical evil. It is an eternal principle that indwells the human body.

What are the objections that we might raise to this theory? Now, if we were good theologians, I’d like to hear some of your responses, but if we were good theologians, we should be able to pick out a few things by now, that are contrary to the theology of the Bible. Well, in the first place, if we were to say sin is an eternal principle of evil, that sin

is really eternal, what are we saying about God? Well, remembering our doctrine of the attributes, we try to point out that only God is eternal. Now, this is opposed to the eternity of God alone. There is nothing else that is eternal but God, and so the idea that there is eternal physical evil, is contrary to the character of God. Furthermore, if we should make, if we should really claim and proclaim that sin is absolutely necessary to man’s constitution, what does that do to man’s responsibility? If it is true, that it is part of our natural constitution, then what can we say about the punishment of sin? Well, it surely would be unjust to punish that which is part of our constitution. Now, you must remember that the sin that indwells the human body now, the sin principle, is an intruder. Human nature does not, of necessity, have the sin principle dwelling within it. For Adam, in the Garden of Eden, was created in innocency. That is, not guilty. He was created in holiness. He was created in perfection. He was created in the image of God. That is the picture of essential humanity. Sin is an intruder. If it is part of our nature by constitution then God cannot judge us for our sins. Now since the fall, it is a necessary part of human nature. Well, this theory then is contrary to the teaching of the word of God.

Second, sin is sensuousness. According to this theory, experience shows us that men are governed by the lower elements of their nature. They seek the gratification of the flesh. They prefer the seen and the temporal, and consequently, the very nature of this that is part of their makeup, is sensuousness. What can we say in objection to the theory that sin is sensuousness? Well, let’s think for a moment. Are all beings that are sinful sensuous? No, what beings are not sensuous, but who are yet sinful, in God’s universe? Can you think of any? Yes. What about the fallen angels? They don’t even have a body, but they have sinned. Satan himself does not have a body, so far as we know, but yet he is of the greatest of the sinners. And so it is evident that sin does not necessarily involve sensuousness. As a matter of fact, what are the most offensive sins among men? Are they the lusts of the flesh? Well, not really. The most offensive types of

sins are the sins of pride, of malice, of envy, of ambition, of enmity to God. And these are sins that do not involve sensuousness.

Let’s turn over to Galatians chapter 5. In Galatians chapter 5, we do have the sins that are sins of the flesh, but you’ll notice even in Galatians chapter 5, there are some of them that are not related to the physical side of the flesh. Verse 19 of Galatians 5 says,

“Now, the deeds of the flesh are evident which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality -- but then look – idolatry, sorcery, witchcraft, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.”

So it is evident, that some of these sins are not sensuous at all.

Now, turn over to 2 Corinthians chapter 7 in verse 1. 2 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 1. Paul writes, “Therefore,” I’ll wait for you to get it. “Therefore, having these promises beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit.” You see, the defilements that are related to our sins are not only sins of the flesh but also sins of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. So it’s evident then that the most offensive sins are not the fleshly sins and not all of our sins are of a fleshly character. Furthermore, if the body is the seed of sin then whatever tends to weaken the passions of the body makes man purer. If all sin is connected with the manifestation of the flesh in the body then everything that I can do to weaken the passions of the body would make me purer. And consequently, if that’s so, then what we might call “monkery” that which is practiced by some large Christian organizations. You know, everyone goes off and lives by themselves, and withdraws from the world, and becomes a monk. And by living a kind of aesthetic life, thus the sin principle is blunted within us. That’s the idea back of that. Well, that would be good because the more that we could do to blunt these passions of the flesh, the purer we should be. But Paul tells us that it doesn’t work that

way. He says in Colossians, you may turn there, Chapter 2, verse 20 through 23. That these things which are associated with sinism, do not tend to weaken the sinful desires at all. He says in Colossians 2:20, “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees such as; do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, which all refer to things destined to perish with using in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men.” In other words, God gave these things to be used, and these ordinances; touch not, taste not, handle not, they are the commandments and teachings of men. And then he adds in verse 23, “These are matters which have to be sure the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement, and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.” In other words; touch not, taste not, handle not, does not help us in the slightest to curb the passions and the things that we feel in our fleshly natures.

So it’s evident that this theory is not true to experience. Experience indicates that aestheticism nourishes pride. It nourishes self-righteousness, and when we engage in this type of activity, instead of helping us, it actually makes us more sinful. I like to think of the time that Dr. Ironside was preaching to us at Dallas Seminary, and he was talking about humility and the cultivation of humility. He said, “When he was a younger Christian worker that he went to an older Christian worker and asked him how he might be able to attain to biblical humility.” And this was in the days when Dr. Ironside was associated with the Salvation Army, and was doing a lot of preaching of the Gospel in the streets. And so this man said to him, “Well Ironside, what would help your humility tremendously is to go get yourself one of these sandwich board type advertisements, and put it over your head you.” Perhaps if you’re as old as I am, you can remember people walking down the street with a board in front and one in the back. And he said, “What you need to do is to write Bible texts over the front and over the back, and walk up and down the streets of this city. And after you’ve done that for a few hours, that will do a

great deal for your humility.” So Dr. Ironside said, “That’s exactly what he did.” He was very earnest about it. He got himself a sandwich board, he wrote biblical texts on the front and on the back of himself, and he walked up and down the streets, and he said when I finished after two or three hours of doing that, the first thought that came into my head was, “There isn’t another man in the city that would have been willing to do that.”
[Laughter]

So all of these outward attempts to curb the passions and desires of the flesh just do not work. As a matter of fact, if it were really true, that sin is sensuousness, Herr Schleiermacher, who is really the man most associated with this theory, if it were really true that sin is sensuousness, then old people should be the best people, because by the time you get old, all of these passions that have disturbed you down through the years, are no longer there. And so you should be extremely holy as you get older. But that is not necessarily true, as we all know, because while the lusts of the flesh may become extinct in measure, the lusts and passions and the sins of the spirit and the mind are just as strong, if not stronger, the older you become. So that theory is not true to fact, and so if you ever read anybody’s interpretations of sin, and they should suggest that sin is sensuousness, you know that that is not true.

Third, sin is selfishness. This is a common view, and many good Christian people have claimed that sin is nothing but selfishness. When they mean selfishness, there are two types of things that are meant by that. Some mean, when they say sin is selfishness, that it is undue preference for our own happiness to the happiness or welfare of others. And so when they say, “Sin is selfishness”, they mean that it is sinful for us to be particularly concerned about our own happiness, rather than the happiness of others. Now this view, as you can see, is based upon the belief that happiness is the greatest good, and promotion of happiness is the essence of virtue. So sin is the seeking of our own happiness, rather than the happiness of the greatest number of people. Now, this is quite common.

Now, many people do believe that thing that we should do as human beings is to seek the happiness of the greatest number of people. But that too, has unassailable objections. In the first place, it confounds the right with the expedient. We may think that it is expedient to seek the happiness of the greatest number of people, but if we have a revelation from God about what is right and what is wrong, and if he should say to us, for example, that, “Holiness is the thing that we should be interested in, rather than happiness”, then we should be interested in holiness, because we are interested in what the revelation of God sets forth for us, as the proper goal in life. Holiness by this would become only the means to an end because the end is happiness. But the Bible does not have anything to say about happiness as the goal of human life and experience. Furthermore, our allegiance is not to men, our allegiance is to God. And so we are interested in the things that God is interested in, not the happiness of the greatest number of human beings. In addition, we are incompetent to determine and this I think is the greatest objection to this theory, we are incompetent to determine what will produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. We do not have the intelligence to understand what would do this. So we could never tell what is right and what is wrong by this theory, if we actually tried to carry it out. And furthermore, if you should think that a certain course of action will be for the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people, and I should think something else is then how should we settle a dispute like that. Well, that idea is certainly not true.

Others hold to a form of this view, but they affirm that selfishness is the making of self, the center of one’s being. In other words, sin is to be interested in myself rather than to be interested in God. Now, I’ve heard a lot of evangelical preachers say this; that sin is really selfishness, or sin is self, or sin is self-love. It’s my contention that self-love is a product of the essential character of sin, and I will try to point that out next time. But what shall we say about this? So alienation from God is the primary principle of sin. To be interested in myself is, thus, the essence of sin. Well, selfishness is sin. There is no

question about that, but there is some sin that has about it, selflessness. And if sin has about it an aura of selflessness, then it’s obvious that sin cannot be selfishness. That cannot be a complete definition of sin because if we could sin and sin selflessly, then it’s obvious, the definition of sin as selfishness is wrong. Well, can we do then? Well yes, I think we can.

Well, let me give you an illustration. Suppose a poverty-stricken father sees his wife and children without food and let’s suppose in order to satisfy the desperate needs of his family, he resorts to theft, in order that they may live. Well, that’s sin. But is it selfishness? I doubt that we would call it selfishness. As a matter of fact, he has exposed himself to the law. He’s exposed himself to judgment. He’s exposed himself to prison because he has a desire to feed his family. It would seem to me that that is selflessness, but yet it’s sin. And so sin is not selfishness, per se. Let’s suppose that a man should be so willing to save his family from eminent danger that he should even do something that is wrong and even lose his life in the process. Well, he would be guilty of sin, but nevertheless, it would be a selfless act. So it’s evident from this that sin is not selfishness or self-love because there are occasions when sin is selfless. So sin is not selfishness, but selfishness is sin, and self-love is sin.

Four. By the way, this idea that the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people is the proper aim in life is essentially the viewpoint of those who believe that our ethics should be determined by the situation in which we find ourselves. In other words, we should not listen to the teaching of the word of God, but we should seek to do what is dictated by the circumstances in which we find ourselves. And if it’s necessary for us to murder, or to kill, or to commit adultery because of the situation in which we are, then we should do these things, because love and the practice of love is the great goal, and the great guiding principle of life. And you recognize that as an aspect of, what has been called, situation ethics, identified primarily with Professor Joseph Fletcher.

Four, sin is an illusion. It is the opinion of some philosophers, Spinoza, for example, that sin is really something that does not exist. It exists for us because we’re ignorant. If we really could look at what we see to be sin in the light of eternity – *sub specie aeternitatis* – if we could look at it in the light of eternity as God does, that is in unity with God, well then, we would have no conception of sin at all because sin just would not exist. It doesn’t really exist. Because we are ignorant, we see sin. Now, as you can see, we have modern counterparts of that in the movement which we know as Christian Science, because that is precisely the kind of philosophy that they have; that sin does not really exist. It only exists in our minds because we are finite human beings. If we could look at things as God looks at them, we wouldn’t see any sin. We wouldn’t see sin. We wouldn’t see sickness. And we wouldn’t see death. They go for this theory whole-hog.

Now, there are objections to this theory. I think it’s obvious to us that this ultimately reduces life itself to an illusion, because if this were really true, then we cannot understand anything. But it particularly fails to account for the terrible positive results of what we have known as sin. For example, can we look at Auschwitz? Can we look at Buchenwald? Can we look at Dachau, and say that there is no such thing as sin? Can we really say that what we have seen as the outgrowth of the Nazism that Hitler brought upon us through the philosophy of Nietzsche, can we really say that that is not sin; that we are deceiving ourselves when we see it as sin. And that if we could look at it as the eternal God looks at it, there would be no sin? I don’t think we could possibly do that. This kind of thing would be sad if that is the only thing that it produced, but we know it produces more than that. Unfortunately, it produces hypocrisy. And in addition, it produces hypocrisy of an almost fatal kind. A person just will not see the things that face him, and will not do anything about it. And no doubt, you in this audience, every one of you, has had some friend who was associated with, really what I think is a satanic theory of sin. And you have seen those who have attracted to Christian Science, who have been

unwilling to recognize sin. They have been unwilling to recognize sickness. They have even been unwilling to recognize death. And then, finally, when sickness does come, and death does come, they are totally unable to deal with it, and it’s not unusual at all for such to commit suicide in the end. So that theory is really a theory of a terrible kind.

Finally, sin is ignorance of God’s purposes. The German philosopher Ritschl and the German theologian Ritschl propounded this theory that sin is really ignorance of God’s kingdom purposes. And this ignorance leads to lack of trust in him, and this is sin. Now, the sin does not exist in the lack of trust. The sin exists in the ignorance. Man reckons this failure to be sin, but God reckons it merely as ignorance and pardonable. So really, the reason man is a sinner is because he’s a finite being and he’s ignorant. So sin is not knowing, but this too is contrary to the biblical teaching.

The Bible says in 1 John 3: 4 that sin is lawlessness. Let me read the text. “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” Sin is the transgression of the law of God. It is not ignorance, essentially. Ignorance is involved in it, as a result of the fall, but sin is the transgression of the law. And every burdened man, every man who has come to a conviction that he is a sinner, knows that sin is a great deal more than ignorance. When a man comes under the conviction of the Holy Spirit because of his sin, he does not cry out to God merely for enlightenment, though that is part of that which he’s concerned about. What he calls out for is deliverance from the burden of judgment that is upon him. And when Paul, for example, even as a Christian in Romans chapter 7 speaks of the sense of the burden of sins in his members, he says, “O wretched man that I am.” The Holy Spirit produces conviction for sin because he produces the conviction that we have violated the law of God. And therefore, we stand under the judgment of God. Not simply because we are ignorant, but because we have directly disobeyed the truth of Scripture.

Our time is up. We’re going to pick this up next time, and move on to the scriptural doctrine of sin. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the revelation of Holy Scripture. And we thank Thee Lord that not only does Holy Scripture satisfy the Christian whose mind has been enlightened, whose heart has been brought to trust in Jesus Christ, but we thank Thee that the truth of Scripture effectively demonstrates that the theories of men are unsatisfactory, and do not really speak to the human situation. They are not true to experience. They are not true to fact.

And we pray, Lord, that we may be subject to this Word which Thou hast given to us, responding to its teaching, that we might not only be delivered from the penalty of our sin through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice, but also from its power in our lives as Christians. To the end may we serve Thee and worship Thee in a more acceptable way.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.