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Sin Always Matters: The Cost of Sin and the Power of Grace

There is nothing more comforting than God's love, grace, and mercy. But if these are the only aspects of God's character we ever consider, we're not getting a complete picture of who God is. We will never be able to process God's love and mercy unless we put them next to God's judgment and wrath toward sin.

Put simply, sin matters to God. Always.

In *Sin Always Matters*, Rick Burgess examines the depth of God's grace and mercy by looking at the costliness of our sins. You'll learn exactly what sin does to us in God's eyes, how God made a way for the perfect provision for our sin, and how our attitude toward sin changes how we see God and our very lives.

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SIN
ALWAYS
MATTERS

The Cost of Sin and the Power of Grace

by Rick Burgess

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Sin Always Matters: The Cost of Sin and the Power of Grace

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INTRODUCTION

I have the honor to be married to Sherri Burgess. She is a mighty woman of God who loves God's Word as much as anyone I have ever known. I am grateful for her impact on me, her husband, and her children. I am blessed to call her my wife, and my children are blessed to call her mom. The title of this devotional comes from a phrase that I've heard Sherri say to our children many times.

When she taught our children about making the right decisions, the importance of God's standard, and the blessing of His boundaries, she always said, "Listen to what I'm saying because sin always matters." This phrase stuck in my mind. "Sin always matters." Sin always matters to God. There's no circumstance where sin doesn't matter. There is no situation where God turns a blind eye toward sin. Sin matters, and it matters greatly. We have only to look at the cross should we ever doubt it.

The epicenter of God's plan to rescue Christians from sin is the day that Jesus, God's Son, was crucified. As a Christian, you've no doubt heard many references to the brutality of death by crucifixion. When we read the details of the various ways the Romans implemented crucifixion, we always recall horrific images of suffering and pain. Pondering this is never a comfortable experience.

In the case of Jesus, we know there were other shocking things He had to endure before He was even nailed to the tree. The crown of thorns. The whipping with the cat-o-nine-tails. Then the burden of the beam! How could He be asked to carry that bloody beam while so wholly exhausted from dehydration and blood loss? We know He was in bad shape because a man was asked to help bring that beam to the final place where they crucified Him.

I don't have the talent as a writer to accurately portray just how horrible a death Jesus chose to endure. But I want you to make sure you hear me say this: His physical death was not even the most painful part. Let me assure you that the most painful aspect of the cross was

when our perfect, holy, righteous Savior took the sin of humankind of Himself and experienced the feeling of separation that sin causes between God and man. Jesus didn't cry out when He was scourged, beaten, or nailed to the cross. But when Jesus, fully God and fully man, felt the effects of sin, He exclaimed, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matt. 27:46). Sin matters. Don't ever believe for one second that it doesn't.

However, don't miss an essential point from the previous paragraph. This truth is at the heart of our faith and this book. Notice I said that Jesus chose to endure the cross. Jesus willingly took on the cross, knowing what was coming His way. He did this, motivated by love for us, to fulfill the will of the Father, whose desire was to redeem humankind from the penalty of their sin. But for sinful humanity to return to a right relationship with God, provision must be made for sin.

You see, God is the holy life-giver. He is the creator of all things. We don't exist without Him. Not only is He the giver of all life, but He rules sovereignly over everything He creates. He didn't just bring us into being; He has ultimate authority over us. His rule is perfect. He isn't just a king; He is a perfectly righteous one. Every aspect of His character and His rule is 100% perfect. And if all this wasn't enough, God desired to create humankind and have humankind live in harmony with Him according to His ways. God's ways, His statutes, reflect His character. In other words, God's desire was and is for His created ones to live in such a way that their lives lined up with who He is.

What a powerful picture of God! We must remind ourselves of these truths because when we do, we understand exactly what sin is. Because God is the perfectly righteous, sovereign author of life who expects His creation to obey Him, sin isn't just a mistake. Sin isn't a goof-up. Sin isn't us just messing up. Sin is rebellion, plain and simple. And death is the only right and just consequence for rebellion against the sovereign, perfect Life-Giver. That's the only way to possibly balance the scales. This isn't because God is bloodthirsty

or vindictive. It's not because He takes pleasure in punishing sinners (quite the opposite). No, death is the only proper consequence of sin because God is holy. There is no other result that is in balance with who God is.

All sin is rebellion against God, and all sin earns death. So, how is it that anyone is alive? Only by God's grace. God, in His grace, has made provision for the sins of humankind. For millennia, God, in His mercy, allowed His people to sacrifice an animal in their place. The sacrificial system was a powerful picture of grace. If I were a Jew living under the Old Covenant, I could take an animal to the Temple and sacrifice it, knowing that God saw the death of that animal as symbolic of my death. There is much grace in this. But God knew all along this system wasn't perfect. The writer of Hebrews points out that this sacrifice had to be made repeatedly and never provided true redemption or lasting justification. God knew this. He knew that the sacrificial system was a beautiful and painful foreshadowing of what was coming.

There came a day when God would make the ultimate provision for the sins of humankind, the day the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus, went to the cross to once and for all satisfy sin's dreadful requirement as the perfect sacrifice. And as we noted earlier, Jesus chose this. The Son obeyed the will of the Father, rescuing humankind from death. Jesus willingly chose to satisfy the requirements of the Law on our behalf to fulfill the will of the Father.

When you consider the misery of all that Jesus endured -- the agony of death and the pain of humankind's sin -- what is your reaction? Usually, our reaction to the brutality of the cross is something like, "Look how much God loves me!" This isn't a wrong reaction. The cross indeed demonstrates God's love, mercy, and grace. We can look to the cross and be very thankful for it. But the cross is also an event where we see God's response to sin. We see His perfect justice and wrath on display. And rather than shy away from it, we should look at it as boldly as we can, accepting it as just as much a part of God's character as His love and kindness. We will never understand

the depth of God's love for us until we understand His absolute opposition to sin. Sin matters to God. It always matters.

Could I ask you for the next 31 days to read this devotional with the cross in mind, considering it a beautiful picture of God's grace and a stark reminder of how seriously God takes sin? The cross doesn't show us that God somehow lessened His view of sin or His need to perfectly address it. God didn't remove His wrath. He just poured it out on His Son so that those who believe in Him might be redeemed and reconciled to Him.

Sin always matters. When we fully grasp this, it changes how we see God and our lives.

PART 1

God, Sin, & Us

DAY 1

God's Attitude Toward Sin

[4] For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. [5] The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. [6] You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. - Psalm 5:4-6

How does God feel about sin? In a lot of ways, this is *the* question. We can't begin discussing our attitude toward sin without first dealing with God's attitude toward sin. In Psalm 5:4-6, David gives us a pretty clear view of God's opinion about sin, and it appears to blow the common phrase "God hates sin but loves the sinner" right out of the water. Does God extend His love to sinners? He does. If He didn't, none of us would be saved. But it is also true that God not only hates unrepentant sin but, according to His Word, hates the unrepentant sinner. How can this be true?

For starters, God hates sin because God is "holy, holy, holy" (Isa. 6:1-3, Rev. 4:8)! This doesn't mean God is somewhat holy. It means He is perfect, 100%, totally holy. And He cannot tolerate even the slightest hint of sin. He does not delight in wickedness.

1 John 3:9 says, "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God." Sometimes, we act like we've forgotten that when God redeems us through the debt Jesus Christ paid for us, God's seed now "abides" in us. For the Believer to live in unrepentant sin is to set yourself in opposition to God. God's hatred of wickedness should cause maximum conviction in our lives. How convicted of your sin are you?

What does this psalm say about those who continue to live in perpetual sin? It clearly says God "hated all evildoers." How do we reconcile this notion of God? Simple. God is perfect in all His attributes. God's love is perfect.

His mercy is perfect. His justice is perfect. And His hatred is perfect. God's hatred isn't like man's hatred. Even God's hatred toward sin is holy.

We live in a society that is so flippant about putting the individual first, mistreating others, lying about anything and everything, deceiving others just to get ahead or make a buck, and committing violence toward each other, devaluing human life as if we are playing a video game. These words from the Bible are saying something quite profound! This isn't just "bad behavior." This is sin. God hates all these things. I repeat: He hates it.

Does God allow sinful humankind to access His love and approval? Yes, He does. In His grace and mercy, He sent His Son, Jesus, to live a perfect life and die an atoning death so that through our faith in Him, we can be saved from the penalty of our sins. By repenting of our sin and placing our faith not in ourselves or our potential for goodness but in Jesus Christ, we can know God's endless and perfect love.

We have access to His grace, mercy, and love. And that truly is amazing. But does God love the defiant, perpetually rebellious, unrepentant sinner? According to His Word, He does not. Maybe today, the lesson for us is to commit to looking at the sin in our lives not as mistakes or slip-ups but as something that God truly hates.

DAY 2

What Is Sin?

[4] Yet I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets, saying, 'Oh, do not do this abomination that I hate!' [5] But they did not listen or incline their ear, to turn from their evil and make no offerings to other gods. - Jeremiah 44:4-5

We can't begin a book on our attitude toward sin without first considering what sin is. God's relationship with the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah is a compelling example of this.

God was constantly telling Jeremiah to deliver bad news to His people. God's people had largely abandoned Him. God was calling them back to Himself and promising judgment if they did not stop following other gods. The people hated Jeremiah and his messages as a result. But the worst thing the people did was to ignore God's warnings. In doing so, they brought the wrath of God on themselves. In their actions, we see the same problem humankind has been dealing with since the Fall in the Garden of Eden.

God told Adam and Eve exactly how to live. He provided everything they needed to live in peace and harmony with each other and with God. But there was one thing God did not give them. They did not have the authority to choose right from wrong. They were to trust that the God that created them would dictate what was right and wrong, what was good and what was evil.

Don't lose sight of the fact that this was God looking after them. God wasn't trying to be a killjoy. God's barriers are blessings. Too often, we see God's barriers as something keeping us from pleasure when, in reality, they are keeping us from destruction. Adam and Eve, and all who have followed, decided they wanted to have a say on what was right and wrong. Remember that God's standard is always correct, but that wasn't good enough for Adam and Eve and is not good enough for people today.

God told His people through the prophet Jeremiah not to go to Egypt and to discontinue the worship of idols, or God would bring not His love and protection but His anger and wrath. He clearly laid out the path back to a proper relationship with Him that would lead to their good. Yet, they rejected His instructions. They made it clear that they enjoyed these pagan practices and that they would continue the practice.

Of course, this is a sin. Ignoring God's instructions is a sin. Doing that which God says not to do is a sin. Not doing what God says to do is sin. And as human beings, we are really, really good at this. We don't think being under God's perfect, benevolent authority is best for us. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, we reject God's instructions and desire to follow our ways. We see this lived out in countless different ways every day.

For example, God clearly says that for a man's own good, he should be sexually pure and that sexual intimacy should be something that is reserved for his wife. This is not because God is trying to withhold pleasure from us. He is instead trying to protect us. He makes it clear that if we follow His standard, it will produce physical pleasure and beautiful, pure intimacy with the woman He has ordained for us to be with. But far too many times, men say, "No, thank you, God Almighty. I am wiser than you. I will pursue this pleasure whenever and with whomever I choose." What is the result? Regret, broken relationships, children born outside of marriage, and so on. Sexual intimacy is just one area where man consistently disregards God's instructions. We could go on and on.

Here's a tip for you: God's ways are always right. When He sets boundaries, these boundaries are blessings. He is perfect, and we are flawed. When we reject His instructions, we are ultimately rejecting Him. Failing to follow His ways, i.e., sinning, is always wrong. There are consequences for our sins, sometimes grave consequences. There were for God's people when they ignored Jeremiah's warnings. Sin always matters.