

Nature of Sin - Imputation of Adam's Sin

by John Murray

The sermon explores the nature of sin, emphasizing its relationship to the law of God and the importance of understanding our obligation to obey God's law.

Duration: 51:06

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 2:19, Romans 5:12, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Corinthians 15:22

Topics: "Imputation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the fourth position of the doctrine of sin. He emphasizes the all-pervadedness of God's law, stating that it extends to all aspects of life and we are always obligated to love and serve God. The preacher mentions three Latin terms - pollution, blame, and liability - which are related to sin. He also mentions the importance of conscience, which is connected to the law of God. The sermon concludes by mentioning that the discussion of sin requires an understanding of historical theology.

Transcript

Father, I thank you. O Lord, O God, blest of thy law, my sense of heart, that we may also come to recognize it. May we also love thy law.

Meditate therein day and night, that knowledge shall complete openness before the reproof and the condemnation of thy law, but not for the perfect satisfaction that thine own Son has given to thy law, and that obedience which is perfect, which is undefiled and undefilable, that righteousness which is acceptable with thee, and do thou grant unto us that closed in that righteousness we may emulate more and more the perfection of our Redeemer who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from his name, amen. Now I will begin with the fourth supposition of our formulation of the doctrine of faith. I just came to look at the source of the arrows, namely the all-pervasiveness of God's law, the all-pervasiveness, and the point there is simply this, that the law of God extends to all relations of life, that we are never in any moment, never in any moment relieved of the obligation which God's law entails for us.

Because there is never a moment, never a circumstance in which we are not under obligation to love and serve God, love and serve God. And if that is true with respect to love, it ought to be true with respect to law, because love and law are correlated. As we found out yesterday, if love is the fulfillment of the law, you never have love, but in relationship to law and in the fulfillment of it.

Now this is just another term that we are never amoral or non-moral. We are always either moral or immoral, but never non-moral. Now it is that principle, the all-inclusive obligation to God, that gives sanctity to all of our subordinate obligations.

I say it is this that gives sanctity to all of our subordinate obligations. We do have obligations to our fellow creatures, to our fellow men, because they are institutions invested with authority, institutions of God's appointment invested with authority, and to them we owe subjection. Within the spheres, we owe subjection within the spheres to which these institutions belong, or the spheres which are defined by these institutions.

Now if these subordinate obligations were not derived of, there would be a contradiction, contradiction entering into human life. We owe subjection to our fellow men within these spheres only because they are divine organisms, and all subordinate obligations, it's always true, it's always traceable. All subordinate obligation is always traceable to our higher divine obligation.

Now you might ask, why deal with this in connection with the subject of sin? Why? It is thoroughly germane to our topic for this reason that nothing is sin unless it is first of all a violation of that higher divine obligation. Nothing is sin unless it violates that higher divine obligation. It is the truth enunciated in the scripture.

There is one lawgiver, one lawgiver. So if the ordinances of man, the ordinances of man require us to violate the law of God, then we must, we must obey God rather than man. And therefore the only criterion of sin is the law of God.

Now, we disobey only when the human ordinance is in excess of divine institution and authority. But if a human ordinance is a legitimate exercise of God-given authority, then disobedience is sin not simply because the act is in violation of the human ordinance, because the human ordinance was divine institution. Now that is the plain effect of the teaching of Paul, for example, in Romans 13, 1-7.

Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. And he that resisteth the powers resisteth the ordinance of God.

He goes on, of course, to speak of conscience. You must be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience's sake. Now, conscience, of course, always relates itself to the law of God.

God alone is lord of the conscience. And if we obey out of conscience, it is because we recognize in the human ordinance an exercise of divinely instituted authority. Now, it may be sometimes that human institutions impose ordinances that are in excess of their God-given authority.

I say they establish ordinances which are in excess of God-given authority. When these ordinances require us to violate the law of God, then we must, as I said, disobey men and obey God. But if these ordinances of men are in excess of God-given authority, but do not require us to violate the law of God, do not require us to violate it, then, of course, obedience is a matter of expedience.

It may be inexpedient to disobey. It may be expedient to comply. But we must remember this, that if they are, if these ordinances are in excess of divine authority, then we may violate them without sin, when a higher divine obligation requires us to do so.

And that is utterly germane to our assessment of what sin really is. Sin must be defined as violation of the law of God, as anomia. Hence the law by which sin is to be judged is not variable, not variable.

Circumstances and conditions will affect the heinousness of violation. Circumstances and conditions do affect the heinousness, the gravity, but circumstances and conditions do not determine what the law of God is. Circumstances and conditions do, of course, determine which aspects of the law of God pertain to us in these circumstances and conditions.

I say they determine what, what relevance, what is the relevance of the law of God in these situations. But they do not of themselves determine what the law of God is. And that's why you can have in this the permanent invariable of divine obligation.

And it is these principles enunciated in command which are the criteria by which we are to judge what sin and sinfulness is. Well, that's all on that. Now, we come to the fourth.

Men's subdivision. Death is not necessarily a sin if we violate it. That is to say, you see, they may be in such a state that the divine law requires us to violate it.

And therefore, if they are in a sense of God-given authority, they do not necessarily oblige us. Now, there are many laws in existence, in a state mediant to violate, but, nevertheless, there are circumstances which arise but it is an obligation to violate them because we have that higher divine obligation evolving. And that applies, of course, in many, many situations of life.

And consequently, I think, it's necessary to liberty of conscience discharge of our divine obligations to recognize that fact. Sometimes it is necessary out of out of obedience to God to violate. And that's not simply when the audience is expressly in violation of divine commandment.

Of course, sometimes it's expressly in violation when the magistrates, of course, commanded Peter and his associates to desist from preaching the gospel. You remember they said, we must obey God rather than men. The human requisition, the requisition of the magistrates was expressly in violation of their divine commission.

On other occasions, laws on the part of men may not be so blatantly in violation. The law of God, now they may not ordinarily require us to violate the law of God. That is, compliance with them may not ordinarily require us to violate the law of God.

And consequently, it is expedient that we should obey them as Christians. But sometimes we shall have to disobey consciously and deliberately in order to fulfill our higher divine obligation. Now, for capital B, no, I said that sin was a real evil, sin was a specific evil, sin was a moral evil, and that is C. And now we come to D. Isn't that correct? Real evil, specific evil, moral evil.

That's the way I said it yesterday? Yes, yes. Oh, I would have to let you know. But if you all hadn't let us adhere to that, real evil, specific evil, moral evil, I may have slipped at that point.

But if you have your notes, sin involves pollution, blame, liability. These three points. Pollution, blame, and liability.

Now, if you like Latin, if you like Latin, if you want to pursue your studies, read the Latin itself. And there is a great deal of theology involved in it. Now, that, of course, as we found already, refers to the defilement of

heart and of mind, the defilement of the disposition of heart, which all sin, and it is very important to bear in mind that sin is never aboriginal abstraction, never aboriginal abstraction.

That is, a lack of will, abstracted from that which is most determinative in the human personality. That which is most determinative in the human personality is the heart, what the Bible calls the heart. That is, that which is most determinative morally and religiously is the heart.

That which is most determinative in the human personality is the heart, what the Bible calls the heart. That is, that which is most determinative morally and religiously is the heart. And what is being emphasized here is the depravity of the heart, a part from which no sin exists.

Isolate, isolate a sinful action from that from which it issues, and it is a pure abstraction that has no reality, that does not exist out of the heart are the issues of life, out of the heart are the issues of death. Oh, you can see how important is this aspect, the use of the silence of depravity, that we are. Then, secondly, it involves blame, and that simply means that the person is blameworthy, blameworthy for everything that is in contravention of divine obligation.

He is blameworthy for everything that is in contravention of divine obligation. And there you can see how important it is, again, to emphasize that aspect of sin, because in a great deal of pseudo-Christian ethics, in a great deal of pseudo-Christian ethics, there is the tendency to excuse the person, perhaps because of ignorance, perhaps because of supposedly ameliorating circumstances and conditions under which the sin was committed. But the point here is that wherever there is sin, wherever there is the contravention of a divine obligation, either by way of omission or commission, either by way of coming short, or by way of overtransgression, there is the blame devolving upon the person of whom that sin is predicated.

Therefore you have liability, and that refers to the penalty, the penalty that accrues to the person because of his blameworthy disposition and action. I prefer to call it the judgment of God, the feeling of judgment devolving upon the person or accruing to the person because of his contravention of the law of God. The judgment, of course, is inevitable, because sin is the contradiction of God, and that which is a contradiction of God must elicit God's displeasure, indignation, and wrath.

And the judgment of God is always epitomized in His wrath. Now here it is necessary to understand the precise force of a term which you will always find in theology, *reactus*, Latin term. It is a substantive, and the corresponding adjective is *reus*, *reus*, that is *reactus*.

Reactus really means liability, liability. Sometimes you will find theologians using the expression *reactus corpi*, *reactus corpi*, in distinction from the *reactus canon*. That is a misuse of the term *reactus*, complete misuse of the term *reactus*.

The classic reformed theology vigorously rejected the distinction between *reactus corpi* and *reactus canon*, on the grounds that *reactus* is always something intermediate between *corpi* and *canon*, always something intermediate, as *canon* states quite properly, that *reactus* is something that arises from *corpi* and leads to pain. Something that arises from *corpi* and leads to pain, that it arises from blame and leads to penance. So bear that in mind, that in reformed theology *reactus* is always conceived of as the liability arising from blame or *corpi*, the liability, and therefore we really speak of *reactus canon*, that is the liability to penalty, but not of *reactus corpi*.

Now let's simply to set straight that terminology. In English we often use this word guilt, guilt, g-u-i-l-t, but there is a certain ambiguity attaching to the use of that word guilt in our common speech, as also to the adjective guilty. When we say a person is guilty, a person is guilty, we mean that he has perpetrated a certain wrong, perpetrated a certain wrong.

And we speak of the guilt as synonymous with the sin itself. That is, it is often used to denote the wrong committed, the wrong committed. So guilt in common parlance is the synonym of transgression, of sin, and we should not interfere with that common parlance, that common usage, because it is common usage that determines the connotation and denotation of a person.

But in theology, in theology the word guilty and also the term guilt is often used to denote the Latin term *reactus*, and therefore denoting the liability arising from sin. That is to say, it is often used in theological discussion to denote what in Latin is called *obligatio ad senum*, *obligatio ad senum*. Now, when in theology guilt is used in that restricted sense, bear in mind that that is what it has reference to, has reference to the obligation to the judgment of God which accrues to sin.

Now to conclude our discussion of the whole subject, if you may take a moment, moving observation, it is very important that our thinking, our thinking, be oriented to these answers, comprehended under these three subdivisions, and I may enforce subdivisions at that time. Why yes, now, because today we may find a great deal of emphasis upon the undecidability, the undecidability of sin, the hatefulness, and even the selfishness, without any truly Christian assessment of sin as lawlessness, and as involving pollution, blame, and guilt. Pollution, blame, and guilt.

Using guilt in the more restricted sense, which I have just stated. The biblical estimate of sin was that it is law, not only undecidable, but damnable. And it is that concept of wrong that enshrines in itself.

It is that concept of wrong that enshrines in itself all that has been, all that I have said, respecting sin as violation of the law of God. And this is also important in our present-day context, to lay particular emphasis, particular emphasis upon the judgment, the judgment which necessarily attaches to sin that contradiction of God and of His perfection. When sin is conceived of as contradiction of God and of His perfection, then we must appreciate the correlating, the correlating, namely, that we act against it with holy displeasure, with indignation, with wrath and condemnation.

We are here confronted with a divine impossibility, a divine impossibility. And this divine impossibility is not His weakness, but His strength, not His reproach, but His glory. He cannot deny Himself.

He cannot deny Himself. And therefore, to be complacent towards that which is the contradiction of God is a divine impossibility, a divine impossibility, that God is holy, that He is justice, truth, and that He is love. And because He is love, He loves Himself supremely.

Loving Himself, we cannot but confront that which is an assault upon His dispute with His power, doubt of His contradiction, of His veracity. Well, just now to pass on to the next main subdivision of our discussion, the doctrine of faith, the second main subdivision of our discussion, the doctrine of faith. I have dealt with nature, then with time, then with it, under these.

Now we come to the next main subdivision, the imputation of Adam's tree. Imputation. This, of course, is concerned with our relationship to the imputation of Adam's tree.

Now I'm going to be lecturing on this for a week or so, and I will be following the lines of what I have in the little book of the imputation of Adam and Eve. I'll be saying for the next week or so, but I could just let you read the book, but I do not think that you will get the material as well as you would if I go over the main point, because there is a great deal in that book that I'm not going to deal with, and I'm afraid you would get lost, especially in the latter part of this book. And so I'm going to lecture on this a bit in order to abbreviate and somewhat simplify and also drive home the main considerations bearing upon this all-important question.

Now, in dealing with this subject, there are two passages in particular in the New Testament that bear upon the question. They are not the only passages, but there are two passages in particular and these are Romans 5, 12-19, 1 Corinthians 15, 22. They are the pivotal passages and a good deal of the discussion will pertain to the interpretation of Romans 5, 12-19.

Now, in dealing with that passage, there are five main subdivisions under which I shall discuss it. A. The syntactical construction, the syntax of the passage, the syntactical construction. Then second, the sin contemplated, that's capital D, capital C, the union involved, the union involved, then D, the nature of the imputation, and then five, and finally, the sin imputed, D, D, C, D. The syntactical construction, the sin contemplated, the union involved, the nature of the imputation, sin imputed.

Now our discussion of this will involve a great deal of historical theology and that is required because the discussion of this question can only be oriented, can only be dealt with adequately if it is oriented to the question of historical theology, to the question that embed in the discussion of this matter in history. Now, our bell will ring presently, so I won't go further today.

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