

Sin, It's Nature and History - Part 4

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon examines the historical and philosophical roots of sin, emphasizing the influence of key figures like Socrates, Plato, and Augustine on Christian thought.

Duration: 46:17

Scripture: Romans 6:1

Topics: "Sin"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses how people often focus on code words rather than the substance of a message. He gives an example of a preacher who used code words like 'perfect love' and 'entire sanctification' to captivate his audience, even though his message contradicted their beliefs. The preacher then delves into the history of the church and the battle between matter and spirit. He emphasizes the power of words and how they can shape the world. The sermon concludes with a prayer for understanding and a reference to Socrates' choice to die rather than live with a chained mind.

Transcript

Thank you. I told you when I was here before that I'm almost frightened of this last introduction. Ever since our brother said to me, or said to the Karnation, it gives me great delight to introduce our brother for the last time.

And I've been almost sort of itchy until that's over. Well, we've got a long way to go this afternoon. I want to take you on a trip through history.

Somewhere along the line, I'll get to a text. And meanwhile, I simply want to ask God to guide us and direct us and lead our thinking. Heavenly Father, we ask that Thou wilt touch our minds, enable us to think together, and to see the relation of things and the implication of things, and understand how that the enemy of our souls throughout the ages has been seeking by one means or another to dilute this rather revealed truth and turn it into something that would fit his evil purpose.

Grant that we will not be ignorant of these devices. We'll understand and then help us to realize that our weapons are not carnal, but mighty to the tearing down of strongholds. And some of these intense, entrenched strongholds we ask by Thy grace to be torn down for the glory of Christ in His worthy name.

Amen. Perhaps the dawn of the so-called intellectual age goes back to a bald-headed--someone described him pot-bellied, bald-headed--knock-kneed carpenter living in Athens many centuries before Christ, who wore the name Socrates. And Socrates wasn't much of a provider.

Now, he had a blessing in the wife. I don't know whether it was because of her that he became great or in spite of her that he became great, but she was a harpy. He made trouble for him night and day.

He couldn't stand the heat in the kitchen, so he wandered around town rather than go home. And every place he stopped, he asked questions, and he got people to think. Well, that was a terrible thing to do, also an awful thing to do, ask people to think, stir up their mind, make them uncomfortable.

But he did it, and he did it very well. Well, he wasn't very much of a provider. In fact, he went to one of his neighbors once in the middle of the night with a lantern and went out in the garden, in his neighbor's garden, and pulled some turnips.

And the neighbor came and said, Socrates, what are you doing in my garden? Can't you see I'm pulling your turnips? Yes, I can see, but they're my turnips. However, you have more turnips than you need, said Socrates, and I just haven't gotten around to planting my garden yet, and I need turnips because my children and family are hungry. So since you've got ones that I don't need, and you don't need, and I do, they're my turnips, they're not yours.

They're in the ground, and therefore I'm taking them. Thank you very much. And he walked out of the yard.

Now, I have a feeling that you have a little suspicion as to what that was, the seed that that was. Do you know it? There was a man that lived in the 19th century, and he had a concept of government and economics, and he said, From everyone according to their ability, unto everyone according to their need. And he blamed Socrates for it.

He said that's where he got the idea. Well, he did. He got the idea there.

Socrates wasn't infallible. He had a lot of misconceptions, but he did get people to think. And he did one thing that was noble, in one sense.

The Greeks got a little tired of him, and they said, Socrates, you're a thorn in the flesh. You are a burr under the saddle. You're making life miserable for us all, and it's got to stop.

Well, you couldn't stop him anymore. You could stop a hurricane. He was on his way, and he was going to go on being Socrates.

And finally, they gave him an alternative. They said, You either go into exile, or you are going to have to take your own life. We can't execute you.

The people won't let us do that, but if you don't go into exile, you'll have to drink hemlock. Well, Socrates said, I'm not going to flee, and if that's what you say, I'll do it. So the day came, and he went out to the, they kept him in a little prison, a cave.

And I've been there. If you ever go to Athens, it's great to go to the Acropolis and to Mars Hill, but don't miss, don't miss the prison cave of Socrates, because that's, well, and he drank that hemlock, and civilization moved ahead about a thousand years in a few minutes. They put him in that prison.

He could look out there and see the glory that was graced the Acropolis. The time came when the soldiers came and brought to him one of his friends in the government, said, It has to be done, Socrates. And he had a cup or a goblet in it that makes the poison.

We call it hemlock. I don't know quite what it was, but hemlock's what they called it. And they gave it to him, and the account is that he drank it without taking it from his lips, and then he waited until the rest of it that had been on the sides of the goblet dripped down into the base bottom of it, and he took the last.

Well, he died. And when he died, as I said, civilization moved ahead a thousand years. For he said, You cannot punish people for what they think, for what they believe.

And he died rather than live. With a chain around his mind and around his spirit, Socrates chose to die. Life wasn't worth living if your mind, your brain, is chained.

But there was a young man that had known Socrates. He was four years old, or five, when Socrates died. This young man's father was a friend, influential in Athens.

And the chap grew up very cunning and very crafty, very clever. And he wanted fame, and he wanted to be remembered, he wanted influence, and he didn't have all that much original intelligence. But he was great at taking something somebody else had and sort of giving it a new twist and making it his.

Never giving credit to the original author, but that was all right, he thought. Well, when he got his basic education from the pedagogues and the tutors that came to his father's home, he decided that he needed a little broader experience, so we were told that he made a trip to Sicily. But he disappeared.

Not much is said about it in Sicily. Well, he didn't stay in Sicily very long, though the record that he gave us, he was there for about five or six years. But when he got to Sicily, it was rather relatively unknown.

So he took a sailing vessel, a passage on a sailing vessel, and he went to the seat of learning other than Athens, to Alexandria, Egypt. And there he was introduced to the great library of Alexandria, but Alexandria was a crossroads between Europe and Asia, and many of the philosophers of India, because India had a very old culture, as well as China, but India particularly, had come to Alexandria to the university. And this man sat at their feet, and he learned a great deal about Indian philosophy and Indian thinking.

Oh, yes, and in Alexandria at the same time were the Jews of the dispersion that had settled there and had been there now, some of them for some hundreds of years, but they were well-established and highly regarded as intellectuals, and he sat at their feet, and from there he heard about Moses, and he heard about God, and about Jehovah. Now, what he's getting, you see, is kind of a mixture of mysteries of India and the theology of the Hebrews, and he puts it into this little mind of his and sort of stirs it up. And then he goes back to Sicily, and then he goes back to Athens from Sicily.

He doesn't tell anybody about the time. It's told by others. That's how he found out where he was and what he did there.

But when he comes back from Sicily, he's got a new philosophy. He's got a whole new concept, and he starts a school. Yeah, he starts a school, because that was a good way of seeing what some of the schools in Athens had done, and he started one.

Now, this is his concept, that there was God, but he didn't want to call him God, because if he did, he might have to give credit to the Hebrews someplace along the line. So, he said the power that created the world was urge. In English, we'd say urge.

The urge, the motivation, the power. And then urge had an opposite, the antithesis, an enemy who was demi-urge. And urge was the one who made everything that was worthwhile.

He made spirit. The man that demi-urge made was pure spirit. But demi-urge came to man, and demi-urge beguiled man, and seduced man, and caused man to want things.

And so, demi-urge captured man. And in anger, urge said, well, if you want things, I'll give you things. And so, he imprisoned spirit in the body.

And the physical body became the prison for spirit. And that was bad. And according to Plato, matter was bad, and spirit was good.

Now, can you imagine who it is that invented that? Can you imagine who it is that wanted to take from God his authorship of creation? Of course. It was his ancient foe. But his ancient foe had to be real clever, and get an ambitious and arrayed little mind out of Athens, the seed of learning, that was willing to prostitute itself for a little bit of fame and recognition and position.

And so, Plato starts the concept of matter being bad, and spirit being good. And of course, you understand that wicked spirits in high places, and Lucifer is of evil, is the prince of evil spirits. Oh, what a whitewash job they got from Plato.

Now, man, made in the image and blindness of God, is bad, and spirit, the ancient enemy of God, has all of a sudden been made good. Pretty clever, wouldn't you say? Very clever. And he's the one who developed that thing we now call platonic love, look but don't touch.

It was platonic, named for Plato. And this thinking, this school of thinking, went on down from one generation to the other, until you come to the time of, about the time of our Lord, when you have a group of people, the Essenes, one of the groups of the Essenes, who had imbibed on this philosophy, and they decided that since matter was bad, spirit was good, that they were going to have a community in which there would be total sexual abstinence, and there would be utter abnegation of the flesh, and there would be starvation of the flesh, and humiliation of the flesh. So this philosophy, this Greek philosophy, that had its origin, as I've described briefly, has now penetrated and is part of the culture, in the community, in the intellectual community, in the time of our Lord.

And obviously, it has its devotees and its scholars, its followers, who are very loyal to it. Well, when our Lord Jesus came, you can imagine what the influence was when it was said of him that, by the Pharisees who had imbibed in that philosophy as well, that this man receiveth sinners, and he eateth and he drinketh with them. Here was somebody that was prepared to meet people where they were, and be concerned about them.

And the Pharisees condemned our Lord for that. Well, it was not long after he had been crucified and buried and raised from the dead, and the church had been established, that we find this philosophy coming in. One of its beautiful effects was to say, well, since Jesus Christ died and was buried and raised from the dead, he died to save our spirits.

And that's a part of us that's going to go to heaven. But our bodies, since they're bad, are going to go on sinning. And so, the more we sin, the more God forgives.

And the more God forgives, the more glory he gets. Well, have you ever heard anything like that? Well, you haven't if you've read Romans 6. But then shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! But the teachers were teaching something that we call antinomianism. Anti-against-nomos-the-law.

Antinomianism. And Paul dealt with that in his Epistles to the Romans. Later on, when he wrote to the church at Colossae, he condemned those who were going around saying, touch not, taste not, handle not.

I heard a good Baptist preacher back in my Baptist preacher days who spoke to a young people's rally on that theme. Touch not, taste not, handle not. Only problem was, he didn't take the next verse which says they shall perish with the losing of this philosophy.

Touch not, taste not, handle not. You see, it had now come down that Paul is condemning these who are trying to infiltrate the church and poison the church with what? With that ancient theory that matter is bad and spirit is good. And Paul had to deal with it.

He had to deal with it in the Philippian letter. It was there continuously. And from that time on until for the next nearly 275 years, 260 years, the church is in a polemic battle with the dualists.

And the Gnostics, Gnosticism from the Greek word gnosis, knowledge, is a superior revelation, a higher knowledge. And the higher knowledge was matter is bad and spirit is good. Now, my, the battles that they had, the conflict that raged over this as the Gnostics were trying to penetrate the church.

But they were withstood successfully throughout the time, throughout up until about 300 A.D. There was a constant battle with these heretics who were trying to say matter is bad and spirit is good. Remember what we said yesterday? When God made man, he gave him a body and he gave him urges and drives and propensities for food, for knowledge, for status, for security, for sex, for pleasure. And when he had finished all that he'd made, he said, it is good.

But the Gnostics were saying, it's bad. And the dualist says, you've got two elements. You've got matter and spirit.

And matter is all bad and spirit is all good. And the battle raged for the first 300 years in the church. Long about 250, 260 A.D., a Persian by the name of Manny, M-A-N-N-Y, Manny had an idea.

Now, remember, Plato had an idea. Now, Manny's got an idea. Beware of those chaps when they get big ideas like this.

Everything begins with an idea. Did you know that? It begins with an idea. Words.

Zappo, the father of pornographic rock, Words, who's been fighting Congress, when he was in one of the hearings last week in Washington, said, well, what are you so excited about on these jackets and on this music? All they are is just words, words, words, words. Can't hurt anybody. Well, I'll tell you, words can.

They framed the world. And they doomed Lucifer. And they brought Adam and Eve into condemnation and death.

Words are important. Well, Manny got words. And what his brilliant idea was this.

If we can take the tenets and the doctrines and the teachings of dualism and Gnosticism and take the vocabulary of Christianity and redefine Christianity by the substance of Gnosticism, we're going to capture the church. Now, that was his avowed purpose, to redefine all of the terms of Christianity with the substance of Gnosticism and dualism. And that meant that he had to go through and move and shape and bring it so that when they looked at the philosophy of Manny, the Christians would say, well, that's what we believe.

Let me illustrate this. You know, most people don't know what Calvin taught or what Arminius taught. All they know is which word they've been conditioned to get mad at.

When they hear the word, their hackles go up. When they hear it, they bark. They're like Panra's dogs.

When they heard a certain bell, they bark. But they don't know the substance. One of my friends was a Bible teacher at a Methodist holiness camp meeting in western Pennsylvania.

And he was Baptist, but he loved the Lord, loved the word. He was a man of God. But he told the young holiness preachers that were there that their people did not hear what was said.

They were listening for the current word so that they could say amen, that they could be happy. They weren't listening to substance. And so this chadol proved it to him.

And so what he did was to give his message, which was in total contradiction to what that group believed. But at the end of a sentence, he'd say, and perfect love, amen. And then he'd give another sentence and go on for a bit and he'd say, and heart purity.

And they'd say, amen. And then he'd give another sentence and he would say, entire sanctification. And again, people came up and said, oh brother, that old time teaching, we'd love to hear it.

And the young preachers that he knew what was happening came to him and said, we never would have believed it if we hadn't been present. The people were not listening to the substance, they were listening for the code words. And so then he said, if we can just keep the code words, we can still the substance in and we can capture the church.

Because open conflict for 300 years had netted zilch, nothing. And so he said, we better change our tactics. Well, running around the Mediterranean this time was a very brilliant, talented, wealthy, young jet setter.

Of course, he had to go on room and galley ships, but they got there once after a while. At any rate, from Alexandria to Corinth to Athens to Rome, he was known as the libertine of libertines. There wasn't anything so degrading and so defiled that he hadn't tried it.

Oh, drunkenness, immorality. When H.L. Mencken read his confessions, someone said to that Baltimore, Maryland publisher, what did you think of the confessions of Augustine, Mr. Mencken? Mr. Mencken, who was something of the same heart and spirit with Augustine, said, oh, too bad, Augustine. He was so titillated and so delighted with what this man had written in his biography.

Now, that chap by the name of Augustine hung around with Manny for nine years. Nine solid years that he attended school under Manny. And he's brilliant.

Absolutely, totally brilliant, is Augustine. But he never could get into the society. He never was accepted into the membership because he was too immoral, too licentious.

He wasn't accepted. But Augustine hung around. Oh, he was, because he hadn't been privileged to be a member, he was the most fanatical and devoted of all of the disciples of Manny because of the restrictions placed on him.

He'd show them. He'd put all the others to shame. Well, his mother's prayers did prevail.

And I believe that Augustine did have an experience with the Lord. I believe that God in his grace did forgive him and that something happened. And when he was converted, he now moved in with all the zeal and the enthusiasm that he'd had in his life of evil.

And the first thing he wrote after his conversion was the refutation of manateism. Or, because he had been inside the movement, it was thought, he was a splendid authority to refute manateism. And he did.

And he sat at length with a good and godly theologian of the time called Pelagius. And Pelagius took the young convert and taught him and instructed him and aided him and helped him. And Augustine used almost all of the arguments and teachings of Pelagius in his refutation of manateism.

And it was published and it went widely throughout the religious world of the time. But after a while, growing very rapidly in honor because of his great talents and gifts, Augustine begins to ask a question. These guys that ask questions, you know, and think, they're really dangerous, aren't they? So what's he say? His question is this.

Why was I such a rotter? Why did I do such terrible things? Why was I such a vicious sinner? Now, up until that time, the only answer he had was the answer of the Bible and the answer of the church. And the answer of the church and the Bible was this. Augustine, you were what you were because you wanted to be what you were.

You chose to be that kind of a person. That's why you were that kind of a person. It was your choice.

But that reflects on him. And now he's become a very pious leader. Isn't there some way he can escape from some of the opprobrium of having chosen to be such a sinner? Well, he came on a scripture verse that he could latch on to.

The scripture verse was from David. And David said, It seemed that my mother conceived me. And oh, Augustine had a bone in his teeth.

Now, or maybe I can say he took the bit in his teeth as a horse and never could be directed again by anybody. He was off and down the road at a breakneck gallop. He now had a way by which he could synthesize Manicheism with Christianity.

It seemed that my mother, oh, the fallen's original sinful nature is transmitted by coitus. That's what does it. That's what he never did read the Bible to find out that David's mother wasn't the mother of the other six boys of Jesse.

David had two sisters from another there, from another father. And apparently Jesse liked and loved this girl. And she became pregnant by Jesse and the husband of the husband, the one who owned her as a concubine.

So, OK, Jesse, we're good friends. You can have her. And he took her.

And you ever wondered why it was that when Samuel came, six boys had their hair plastered down and nice new coats on with bow ties. And one of them's way out in the hills somewhere. Well, it was because David was the little so-and-so in the family.

Let that little so-and-so take care of the sheep and keep him away from here. But, you know, the God who took Ruth and put her in the age of Christ likes so-and-sos for some reason. I don't know.

If he hadn't, he would never have picked us. We would never be with him. We wouldn't have a special love for so-and-sos.

But he did. And so he said, well, don't you have another son, Jesse? Yes, I do. And the boys look at each other and say, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

So he comes in and a horn of oil is poured on the son of Adam. Sure, David is telling the truth. He's telling the truth, but it wasn't true of everybody.

But old Augustine, he didn't bother to look that up, see. He just went ahead and took it and ran down the road with it, shaking that old bone all over, all over the Christian world. And now he's writing.

And what he is doing is taking the works of many and he's bringing them into the church. Now, I want to tell you this. I'm trying to do this as quickly and as vividly as I can, but the history's there.

Inside of 20 years after Augustine is converted, Manichaeism as a movement disappears. Why? Because it's become synonymous with orthodoxy. It's moved into the church of Rome.

Have you ever wondered why the church split to that of Bishop of Rome and Jerome remained the Bishop of Jerusalem? It's because the people in Jerusalem under Jerome said we aren't going to take this kind of nonsense. Did that upstart young Augustine, Bishop of Rome, self-appointed Bishop of Rome, is put down? We want to buy it. Now, Pelagius had been working in Rome, but now Augustine puts a price on his head because he's a heretic.

And Pelagius, by night, is smuggled out and put on a vessel that sails him on the back ways around and lands so he can go to Jerusalem under the protection of Jerome. And he lived in Jerome's house. And when Bishop of Rome wrote to Jerome and said, You are here harboring a criminal under that I have sentenced to death for heresy, good Jerome wrote back and said, My dear brother Pelagius is living in my house as my guest.

I have carefully examined him and find that he believes nothing that the church has not believed for the past 300 years or until you came along, good Bishop Augustine. And Pelagius stayed there, protected by the care and oversight of Jerome. But now watch what happens.

What grows up? Well, look at the theology that's now coming. Augustine, now sitting in the saddle of the church at Rome, is able to direct the church anywhere he wants it to go. Now, if it is true that the fallen nature, original sin is communicated by the act of coitus, then it is true that the moment infants are born, they are sentenced to death.

And Augustine himself wrote this, Should it be that twins are born to godly parents, and while the priest is baptizing the one born first, the second one is born and dies before the priest can apply the formula and

the water. And the first one then dies, because the first one has been baptized, he will be forever in heaven enjoying the bliss of our Lord, and the second one will burn forever in the devil's hell. Baptismal regeneration has now become a startling, shocking fact, absolutely unbiblical and unscriptural and no basis whatsoever in the word of God, but it is consistent with Gnosticism, it's consistent with Judaism, it's consistent with Platonism.

The word says that by matter is banned. One of the next things you will find happening is that the priests who mediate this salvation are forbidden to marry, so they should not engage in the sin of coitus. And they should be married only to the Lord, and so you have the celibate clergy develop, because the body is bad, matter is bad, spirit is good.

And then you have for the women the formation of the convent, who would be married to the Lord so that they would never have to indulge in the simple acts of human conception and birth. And it's based upon dualism, or Gnosticism. But we go a step further.

We now find that in order for one to be spiritual, they must be totally separated from the world. And so we have convents and monasteries that are formed, so that those who wish to be spiritual will no longer have to look upon this world of materialism, but can go in with a minimum of human comforts, and there can abnegate the flesh, there they can live in this world where the spirit only is nurtured and protected. And so it isn't long, as time passes in the history of the Church, until you have the stylites occurring.

The stylites, these holy men who went wherever there were ruins, as in Egypt were the great columns, and in Greece, and in North Africa, and across the world. Wherever there were standing columns, the ruins of men's work, these holy men would find a way to get to the top, and there they would live on the top of a marble pillar. Stay there, live there, sleep there, eat there, grow old there, die there.

They were called stylites, pillar-livers, living on top of a pillar. Why? Because they were, by their being there, deprived themselves of all but minimal food and water, they're saying look down, and they could look down upon the grandeur of men that had been destroyed. Matter is bad, spirit is good.

And then you had the flagellantes. They came along about this time. These were the men that would go into the marketplace and would tell the priests, now, that all matter is bad.

All wealth is bad. All things of material are bad. And to prove it, they would take the cat and nine tails with which our Lord had been scourged, and they would stand there and swing it around and tear the flesh off their own backs, until the ribcage would show to say, I put no confidence in the flesh.

The flesh is bad. Now, where did you learn that? Where did that come from? Did I tell you that Plato had been down in Alexandria? Have you ever gone, in real life, have you ever gone into a Hindu temple? Have you ever seen the banks of candles and all of the shrines that are in a Hindu temple? You ask, how did they ever get into Western Christianity? And this abnegating of the flesh, the flagellantes, the pylites, the stylites, how did that get in? Remember I told you that Plato had spent a lot of time with the philosophers of Egypt? You go to Egypt and you see the fakir, the holy man, lying on a bed of spikes or walking on a bed of coals? Or measuring the subcontinent by putting a mark in the dirt, placing his toes in the mark, lying down, drawing another mark with his hands as far as they'll reach, getting up and putting his toes in the mark, and so crossing the continent of India in that form, just to say the flesh is bad. Abnegating, punishing, humiliating the flesh.

Now, what's the effect upon all of this? What's the effect upon it? How did this come about? Now let's go back to Augustine again. Augustine had a concept. He put it into a philosophy.

His philosophy included this. Because of man's original sin passed on to him by the act of coitus, everything that he does is bad. He's totally governed by this flawed, sinful nature that he inherited by genitally from his parents.

And he is incapable of doing any good, whatever. That's the basic concept. Total moral inability.

Augustine said man can neither do nor will to do anything that is good. But because matter is bad, he's in a human body with a human personality. Now, in order for there to be some semblance, if man cannot do nor will to do anything that is good, man can't repent.

Man can't believe you. Because that's good, and he can't do it. So he had to make a system that was such that it would logically be cohesive.

And so the next thing that he stated was, and this was later crystallized as the five points of Calvinism, but Calvin never had an original thought in his life, as far as I can see. He got them mostly from Augustine and the others that have written across the years. But he had the second point, which was unconditional election.

From among this mass of subhuman beings, because now they're not human any longer, they have no choice, no ability to will or to choose, they've become a subspecies, God unconditionally chooses some, a few. Unconditionally chooses a few. Unconditional election to be saved.

Now, having made that choice at some point in time past, maybe before the world, whatever it was, he then lets his son come into the world and die, but his son is dying only for that company of the elect. So it's a limited atonement. Limited only to those that have been previously selected for salvation.

But because man can neither believe nor will to believe what is good, he can't repent, he can't believe, and so there has to be another consistency put in, and it's called irresistible grace, in which God sovereignly quickens the spirit of the elect to the point where they will respond because they have now been inclined by God to respond. We have irresistible grace. And then finally we have the preservation and perseverance of the saints.

And those who take those and make an acronym out of it...

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