

INTRODUCTION

Please open your Bibles with me to Romans 1. We are going to start looking again at the passage of scripture that begins with verse 18 but culminates in the end of the chapter where we are today. The topic of the message today is on sin—and yes, I am against it. Grady Nutt, a Texas who is now with the Lord said, "I grew up in a Baptist church so I learned about sin from the experts." I guess he was saying we're experts about it.

Many farmers in South Alabama and South Georgia grow peanuts. It's one of their main crops. I heard about a preacher who moved down there from the north who didn't know anything about peanuts. One Sunday after he preached on sin, a little boy came forward. This was a boy who ran around with two others. He came down front crying and said, "Preacher, oh, I have sinned. I have been throwing peanuts into the river." The preacher said, "That's okay, son, God will forgive you." The next Sunday he preached on sin again, and the second little kid in the group of three came down, and said, "Oh, preacher, I have sinned. I have been throwing peanuts into the river." The preacher said, "Well, God will forgive you, son. Go back to your seat." He was perplexed by this thing of throwing peanuts into the river, so the preacher asked the third little boy, "Your two friends are really upset, and they have confessed the sin of throwing peanuts into the river," and he said, "What's so bad about that?" The little boy said, "Well, my name is Peanuts."

Sin is the topic of this message and if you don't have any trouble with sin, you are dismissed. You can go to the cafeteria because the message is not for you, but if you struggle with sin in your life even as a believer, we're going to talk today about how to overcome it. We're also going to talk about the consequences of it. Begin reading in Romans 1:28-32:

"Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice."

Then he changes from talking about what they do to what they become.

"They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them."

When a person rejects God's truth, God "gives them over" to:

Sometimes, people say, "Well, I don't do some of the things the Bible calls sin, but I don't condemn others that do it, and I don't mind other people doing it." Well, you'd better be careful to not only avoid doing it yourself, but be careful you do not approve of others who live a certain way. Today, as we talk about the slippery slope of sin, I want you to see those three times where the Bible says God gave them over. Look at verse 24, "When a person rejects God's truth, God

gives them over” to **1. degraded acts**. They do things degraded in nature. The second time the phrase is used, God gives them over to **2. shameful desires**. That’s exactly what it says in verse 26. It says “God gave them over to shameful lust...” (desires) The third time it says God gave them over, he gave them over to **3. a depraved mind**. Now, I believe, he has reversed sequence, because a degraded act is never done until there is a desire—it starts in the mind. What I want to do today is talk to you about the slippery slope of sin, and how when you get on this slippery slope of sin before you know it, you’ve gone much too far, and you’ve gone much too fast. There are five steps people follow when they slide down this slope:

1. A tempting thought ⇨ a sinful desire

It starts with a tempting thought. What begins only as a tempting thought may slide down and become a sinful desire. A tempting thought is not sinful. Sometimes people come to me very upset, because they say, “Pastor, I am having all of these terrible thoughts that run through my mind. There must be something wrong with me.” I’ll tell you what’s wrong with you. The same thing that is wrong with every one of us: We are sinners by nature and by choice. We are targets of the devil’s temptation, and he will always try to make us sin. But, the fact that a tempting thought comes through your mind does not make it sin. Let me explain. You cannot keep bees from flying in the air over your head, but you *can* keep them from building a beehive in your hair. The same is true with tempting thoughts. The thoughts are going to be there, but you do not entertain them, you do not allow them to lodge in your mind. So, tempting thoughts are not sinful. But, if they become something you hang onto, fantasize about, visualize about, it can cross over the line and become a middle sin or a sinful desire.

Did you know it is possible to commit sin without even doing an act? Jesus talked about it there in Matthew 5:28, in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” So many people have trouble with that verse, because they realize it is possible to commit what we call “mental adultery,” or adultery in a person’s heart. Let me explain the difference between a tempting thought and a sinful desire. You could look at somebody of the opposite sex and say that person is nice-looking. That person is beautiful or that person is handsome. Just to *notice* is not a sin, but if you entertain thoughts about entering into a sexual relationship with that person, you begin to fantasize it and visualize it, then, yes, Jesus said you can step over the line and you can commit adultery in your heart with that person, but it all began with a tempting thought. So, the thing you do, is when the thought comes, do not entertain it. Do not hang on to it. You be careful! A tempting thought can become a sinful desire.

2. A sinful desire ⇨ an evil deed

A sinful desire may become an evil deed, an act you commit. After 30 years of pastoring and listening to thousands of stories, you’d be amazed at how many people have come to me through the years, and say, “Well, pastor, I’ve gotten involved in a relationship that’s wrong. I had already committed adultery in my heart or in my mind so I thought, ‘What’s the use? I might as well just do the deed.’” Don’t be stupid! Sin is sin but the consequences of sin vary greatly. The consequences of mental adultery are relatively minor as compared with the terrible consequences of actually doing the deed itself. There are not categories of sin, but there are categories of the

consequences of that sin. I promise you this: there was never an act of adultery or act of any sin that just *happened*. It started with a tempting thought, which became a sinful desire, which became an evil, wicked act.

The problem with sin (S-I-N) is found in the middle: "I." We all have an "I" problem. Sin is when I say I'm going to do what I want to do. I don't care what God says, I don't care what the consequences are. I don't care who I hurt. I'm going to do what *I* want to do. It's always a desire. When you do it, all you are doing is feeding the sinful desire; it starts that way. Our problem is we have wicked hearts. Don't deny the fact we all have a wicked heart. 2,700 years ago, Jeremiah pointed his finger at each one of us said, "The human heart is desperately wicked, full of evil. Who can know it?" We don't need any more evidence than that.

Simply open your newspaper, turn on your television. I must tell you that this week when I learned another teenager took guns to school and started firing at his classmates in Springfield, Oregon, I was saddened and terribly broken-hearted, but I was not surprised. We are going to see more of it. Why? Part of the human problem is a problem with the human heart. Clinical psychologists can hold symposiums from now until Judgment Day, but until we bring the moral issue of the depraved human heart back in, they are not going to make any progress. It's like rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. It's like mopping the floor while the faucet is still running. They are not going to the root of the problem.

I'll tell you what I believe the problem is. You can label me a right-wing fundamentalist if you like, part of a vast right-wing conspiracy if you want to, but I believe 32 years ago when Texan Madalyn Murray O'Hair influenced the United States Supreme Court to take prayer and Bible reading out of public schools, we gave in to her and now 32 years later, we are reaping the bitter, sinful fruit of a generation that never knew God. That's just an observation of the source of the problem. Now, what are we going to do about it? We are going to have to teach and preach from the homes and from the churches that we all have a sinful, depraved heart and unless Jesus is allowed to change our hearts, there is going to be all kinds of evil idolatry, lust, envy, all of those things Paul talked about. But it starts with a tempting thought, then it becomes a sinful desire, then it becomes a wicked act.

3. An evil deed ⇔ a wicked habit

Let's look at the next step in the process. Next, an evil deed can become a wicked habit. Number three, an evil deed can become a wicked habit. There are some good habits. And you ought to cultivate good habits like flossing. Exercise, reading your Bible, praying and coming to church on Sunday are good habits. Hebrews 10:25 says, "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as some are in the habit of doing." Some people have gotten out of the good habit of coming to church. So, there are good habits and there are bad habits, but every habit started with an act. You did that deed, and then you did that deed again, and then you did that deed again until it became a habit. Now, we are talking about wicked, sinful habits. I can use a lot of different illustrations. I'm not picking on anybody. I can use the habits of overeating, watching soap operas, etc.

Just think about the cigarette smoking habit. That’s one addiction some people have. Other people have other habits or addictions. Everyone hooked on cigarette smoking started with the first cigarette? I’ll be honest with you. I hope you don’t think any less of me, but I have smoked cigarettes. I have probably smoked three in my whole life, all before I was 12. I remember the first one I smoked. My buddy and I went out in the doghouse behind my house. That’s a good place to start that kind of habit. I had stolen a pack of my daddy’s Viceroy filter cigarettes. We went out there and we thought we were big men. For those of you who have smoked, do you remember your first reaction when you took that first puff on a cigarette? When you take that first puff, you suck in that smoke and you say, “Hmm, that makes me feel so good.” NO. Everybody has the same coughing reaction. Your body is trying to tell you something. “This is not good for you!” but you have to overcome it and resist it and you say, “Well, I want to be a big boy. I want to be tough. I want to look cool, so I’ll do it again. Before long you quit coughing, you quit hating it and before long you are hooked on it and you like it. Before long, you’ll begin needing it.

I’ll be honest with you. I really do hate cigarette smoking. I don’t hate cigarette smokers. I love cigarette smokers, but I believe my mom and dad who smoked two packs a day and died of cancer in their fifties, I really believe they would be here today for Mother’s Day and Father’s Day had they not smoked cigarettes all their lives. Hey, kids. Listen to your old preacher for a minute. Every time you see a cigarette, you ought to think of a bullet because a cigarette and a bullet are exactly the same thing. The only difference is a bullet will kill you quickly and a cigarette will kill you slowly. But if you get hooked on them then you become a victim of it. It’s that way with any habit. Once you start doing it, it begins with an act, and then you do it over, and over, and over again, and an act becomes a habit. It all started with just a thought. I think I’m going to smoke a cigarette. I want to smoke a cigarette. I will smoke a cigarette. Before you know it, it becomes a habit. You say, “Well, big deal, I have that habit.” Well, let’s keep going. I want you to see where sin ends up.

4. A wicked habit ⇔ a corrupt character

A wicked habit becomes a corrupt character. Now we’re talking about character qualities. We’re talking about not what a person *does*, but who they *are*. In fact, look again at the last few words of verse 29-30. This doesn’t talk about what people *do*, this talks about what people *are*. “They are gossips, slanderers, God haters. They are insolent, arrogant, boastful, they invent ways of doing evil, they disobey their parents.” We’re talking about character here. When there is a corrupt character, it started with a thought, which became a desire, which became an act, which became a habit, which becomes a character.

You’ve all heard of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer. Dahmer confessed to killing 17 people over a period of 13 years. He confessed to 17, but there may have been many more. At his trial, clinical psychologist, Dr. David Abramson said, “Mr. Dahmer knew what he was doing, and he knew it was wrong, but once he committed murder number one, murder number two was just a little bit easier, murder number three and four, and so on down the line became easier and easier.” Once you start doing something wrong, you then justify it in your own mind, and it becomes a little bit easier to do it the next time, and the next time, and the next time, and suddenly a habit has caused you to be a certain kind of person—a different character.

Now, at this point, I want to stop and put a little parenthesis in here. “Pastor, are you talking about Christians or non-Christians up there?” The answer is yes, both. But there is a tremendous difference: A Christian may fall into acts of sin, and maybe even develop for a short period of time habitual sin, but it is impossible for someone who calls himself a Christian to continually, habitually commit the same sin over and over and over again. It is impossible. You want Bible proof? Here it is in I John, 3:9-10: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin because God’s seed remains in him.” He cannot go on sinning. It’s not that he doesn’t want to, it’s impossible for him to go on sinning because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are. The Bible makes it clear that tragically, sadly, Christians sometimes fall into occasional acts of sin, but it is impossible for a true, born again Christian to continually and habitually sin. It’s not our nature. We got a new nature when Jesus came into our heart. A lost person can sin and enjoy it but a Christian cannot ever sin and enjoy it. A wicked habit can become a corrupt character.

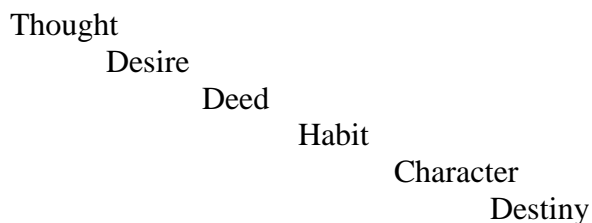
5. A corrupt character ➡ deadly destiny

Here’s the last step in this slippery slope of sin. A corrupt character can become a deadly destiny. Isn’t it sad what started as a thought slipped down and became a desire, and slipped down and became a deed, and slipped down and became a habit and a character, and before you know it there is a destiny? What do I mean by destiny? Look at Romans 1:32 again. “Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them.” Let me just make it real clear in case you have never understood this: After a person dies, there are *two* and *only two* destinations or destinies. For those who have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and have repented of their sins and put their faith in him, and their trust in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for their salvation, they go to a place Jesus called paradise—we sometimes call it heaven. And that’s where we will be for all eternity. That is eternal destiny. But, in case you missed it, there is only one other destiny. There is no purgatory. There is only one other destiny, and it is a place called hell, which is separation from God forever, and ever, and ever. When everyone in this room dies, they are going to end up in one of those two destinies. There is no middle ground.

Some time ago somebody came up to me and said, “You know preachers today don’t preach on hell and sin anymore.” Well, I preach on them. It’s just I usually preach a whole lot more on how to *miss* it than just information about it. I want to tell you God does not want anybody to spend eternity separated from him in hell. God doesn’t want anybody to go through eternal death. Revelation, 20:14 describes the eternal destiny for someone who has never come to Christ, who has a corrupt, Christless character: “Then, death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” That’s hell. What do I mean by “second death?” If this is your lifeline when a person dies physically, that’s only the first death. If a person has rejected God’s love and Grace all their life, when they die, they’re going to experience a second death which is an eternal death, separation from God forever and ever.

But it does not have to be that way! All of us are born physically but somewhere along the way in your life, you must be born spiritually. Jesus told Nicodemus, “You have to be born again.” Here’s the eternal equation, you’ve heard it before: If you are only born once physically, you’re going to die twice, but if you are born twice, physically and spiritually, you’re only going to die once. So, the most important question you ought to be asking yourself today is, “I know I have been born physically, I know what my birth date is, but have I ever been born again spiritually?” If you have never been born of God, born of the spirit of God, you are facing a pretty bleak eternal destiny, a deadly destiny.

God does not want it to be that way. That’s why Jesus died on the cross. God made provisions for our sins to be forgiven. Now, I want to illustrate this whole slippery slope:



I want to illustrate it by using a story Jesus told in Luke 15. It’s often called the story of the Prodigal Son, but it’s not really about the son, it’s about the father, because Jesus is saying “This is what God is like.” A man had two sons. The younger son said, “Dad, I know one of these days, you are going to die, and I am going to get a part of your estate. But actually you are just as good as dead to me right now, Dad, so I want you to go ahead and give me all the stuff I’ve got coming to me!” You know what most fathers would have done? They would have said, “NO!” and slapped him around a little bit.

Jesus was telling us God is a father who has the kind of nature and character that if one of his children wants to turn and walk away in sin, it breaks his heart, but he lets him go. By the way, if anybody in this room wants to walk away from God, he won’t stop you. He loves you, and it’ll break his heart, but he loves you. We’ve been reading this three times in Romans 1. “He gives them over...he gives them over...he gives them over.” So, he gave his money over to his son and he gave his son over to the money. “See you, Pop!” And he was gone. He wasted it all in riotous living. He lived it up. He had fun! Party hearty! Fun! Suddenly, he ran out of money, ran out of friends, ran out of anything to do, and he found himself in a hog pit, a bunch of mud, manure, filth and slime. Do you know why Jesus didn’t say he was in a cattle yard or a chicken yard? Why did he say a pigpen? He was talking to Jews and you know Jews think cows and chickens are okay, but swine are the dirtiest things on earth. Here was a good Jewish boy in the pigpen. Now what started out as a thought, “I want to have some fun!” became a desire. “This is how I can have some fun. I’m going to get some money from my daddy. Give it to me” He took it and started doing the wrong thing and suddenly he was in a pigpen. Do you know what happened then? The father went looking for his son, found him in the hog pit, pulled him out of the hog pit, washed him off and said, “Here, son, let’s go home.” Right? Wrong. That’s not what Jesus said. You say, “Wait a minute. That’s what I would do if it were my child.” Well, you’re not God, and I’m not God, and that’s where we fall short. God is the perfect father. Do you know what God knew? God knew had he gone into the pigpen and pulled him out, and washed him off, one day

he would have ended up in the pigpen again. So you know what the father did? His heart was broken, but he waited. I think he looked down the road every day. Every day his heart was broken as he thought about that child who had wandered away.

One day the boy looked around and said, "Whoa! How did I get here? This is awful. You know what? I made a big mistake. I have to go back." I have good news for you today. It's pretty simple, but here it is: *You* decide when to stop the slide. *You* decide when to stop the slide. It's up to *you*, and God is waiting for you to decide how far down you are going to go, and when you're going to stop, and when you are going to come back. Look at what the son said in Luke 15, "I will set out and I will go back to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men.'" So, he got up. That's what some of you need to do today. You need to get up and go to the father. The rest of verse 20 says, "But while he, the son, was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to kiss his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

I imagine his father looked down the road every afternoon. One afternoon he looked down the road and saw a figure with a particular gait—there was something familiar about it—but, then he looked at the person, and said, "That can't be my son. This is a broken, emaciated, shell of a man." But when he looked closer his heart leapt in his chest and he said, "That's my boy!!!" and the Bible says, "he *ran*." God will run to meet you too.

This is the only time the Bible ever speaks of God getting in a hurry—when he runs to meet a child who has gotten out of the pigpen and started back home...But, he didn't go to the pigpen. What that says is when you take one step back toward the Father; he will run to meet you. He'll throw his arms around your neck. He'll kiss you. He'll kill the fatted calf. He'll put a ring on your hand. He'll put shoes on your feet. He'll put a robe on your back. He says, "You're back, and now, I can bless you." God can't bless you while you're in a pigpen.

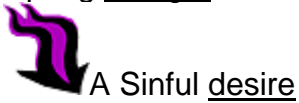
Where are you on this slippery slope of sin? You deal with sin when it is a temptation. You resist it. If you don't it becomes a desire, it becomes a deed, it becomes a habit, it becomes a character, it becomes a lifestyle. If you are out there in a mud hole at the bottom of this slippery slope of sin, if today you will say, "Father I need to come back to you," he'll say, "Come home. Come on home" If you're tired and weary, "Come on home!"

OUTLINE

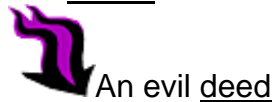
When a person rejects God’s truth, God “gives them over” to:

1. Degraded acts (24)
2. Shameful desires (26)
3. A depraved mind (28)

1. A tempting thought



2. A Sinful desire



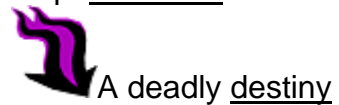
3. An evil deed



4. A wicked habit



5. A corrupt character



Good News!! **You** decide when to stop the slide.

“I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father.” *Luke 15:18-20*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes