

Of Man's Fall (Part 3)

Mt 12:33-37 & WCF 6.5-6.6

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 7 April 2019, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Is a born-again person (a Christian) still a sinner – can he/she still sin?

Yes, God's Word makes it very clear (and WCF 6.5 summarises it correctly) that even our spiritual rebirth does not instantly and automatically cancel the consequences of our fallen nature.² Yes, you & I – although we have been born again by the Holy Spirit – remain tainted by sin's power until we are completely glorified, after our death, in heaven! Only then will we and our actions be sinless!

So, corruption remains throughout the Christian's life on earth. And here's the sad thing: corruption's remnant in us brings forth ugly things which may truly and properly be called "sin!"

Well, WCF 6.6 reminds us of at least the following three things which are the consequences of man's sin...

- Guilt
- Wrath
- Curse

In this sermon, I will mostly focus just on the first two: guilt and wrath!

Guilt

My brother & sister, does the Bible talk of guilt – guilt that sinners have before God; guilt because they have transgressed God's Law?

Yes, it does, in many places. Just remember, e.g. Jer 2:22

"Although you wash yourself with soda/lye and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt³ is still before me," declares the Sovereign LORD.⁴

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. I (chapters 1-8 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from these sources.

² Look, is that not why the Apostle Paul, *after at least 20 years of being a Christian* (from about 33-37 AD when the Lord changed his heart, until about 56-57 AD when he wrote the letter to the Romans (and Rm 7:15ff), still had to confess (in Rm 7:15), *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate*.

³ In Hebrew, `āvōn (אָוֹן) iniquity, guilt or punishment of iniquity (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [*Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*](#) (p. 730). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁴ Also cf. among other Je 13:22; 30:14, 15; Ez 28:18; Ho 9:7

Also remember Rm 2:15 where the Apostle Paul says that even pagans who have never heard of God, have the law of God written on their hearts, and that their consciences will tell them when they are guilty on the Last Day when God will judge all people!⁵

So, God's word speaks clearly about the reality of guilt!

But the world likes to deny that!

You see, the world has seen many revolutions, e.g. the French Revolution, the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and many others. These all had a major impact on the lives of those involved!

But have you heard of the *Cultural Revolution* of the 1960's?

Well, it is said that this Cultural Revolution has brought about more changes in our customs, values, and way of living than did many of those other big revolutions.⁶

Indeed, in the sixties and early seventies, we saw a revolution in...

- sexual moral attitudes;
- in the rise of the drug culture;
- in the breakdown of authority systems;
- the legalisation of abortion;
- and the rise of popular movements which separated personal ethics/morals from social ethics/morals.

Yes, it was in the sixties that the following slogan became popular: "Everyone is entitled to do his/her own thing!" Well, what self-centred & subjective way of making your own conscience the standard for acceptable morals! Yes, what *subjectivism*!

So, instantly, people embraced subjectivism and "threw out the window" objective truth and authority!

Yes, those who have fallen into the pit of subjectivism would say, "Everyone is entitled to do their own thing!" But those who still clung onto good "old" objectivism would say, "No, tell it like it is!"

Perhaps you say, "But what does this all have to do with the point – the point of guilt!"?

Well, it has to do with the fact that guilt is *objective* – guilt is real! But, the generation in which we live does not accept that guilt is objective! No, they determine guilt by how they *feel*! So, this is what they say, "If it *feels* good, then it *is* good!" "How can something be wrong when it *feels* so right?"

My brother & sister, there's a big difference between *feeling* guilty and *being* guilty!

You see, it's totally possible to *incur* guilt yet not *feel* guilty!

I mean, does not the Bible tell us that we can sear our consciences⁷ and become so stubbornly resistant in our hearts that we can even smother/stifle the voice of our conscience – yes, that we can stop our ears & hearts from feeling any great remorse for our sin!?

Yet, what will it help to say, "I don't *feel* guilty; therefore, I *am* not guilty!"?

⁵ Rm 2:15-16 ***They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.***

⁶ On this, cf. Sproul (ibid:193)

⁷ Cf. e.g. 1 Tim 4:1-4 (especially v.2), ***Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.***

You see, think about this! Would that go down in a court of justice? Yes, what if you'd say to a judge, "Your honour, I don't *feel* guilty, so I *am* not guilty!"? Will such nonsense get you very far?

Ha!

You see, when it comes to the question of whether the crime was committed and the law violated, *one's feelings have nothing to do it!*

So, here is a major point, i.e. that the WCF 6.6 reminds us that every sin we commit, brings *objective* guilt; yes, a guilt which is measured by the degree to which you & I have transgressed a *real* law.

Now this means (that) if you & I break the law, we are guilty. If we then *feel* guilty – as we *should* – well, that's good!

How wonderful if everyone who *is* guilty would also *feel* guilty, and not fool him/herself by trying to suppress the truth in his/her conscience!

My brother & sister, here is something beautiful: What is the Bible's only cure for real/objective guilt? Well, is it not objective/real *forgiveness* granted by God through the love-sacrifice of Jesus?

And do you know how this real forgiveness comes about?

Well, only by objective/real *remorse*, which leads to objective/real *repentance*!

Indeed, remember Ps 32:5

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity (guilt);⁸ I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.⁹

Yes, the reality of guilt can only be dealt with by real forgiveness!

Now, look how sinful man can be! You see, even when it comes to forgiveness, sinful man does the same he did with guilt – i.e. that he will say, "But I don't *feel* forgiven, so then I *must not be* forgiven!"

My brother & sister, the test is not based on our feelings!

Here is the great comfort: If God says He will forgive us when we confess our sins (1 Jn 1:9), and we have indeed confessed our sins, then you & I can rely on the objective truthfulness of the promise that we *are* now forgiven!

So, may we understand that, just as there is objective/real guilt, so is there real forgiveness!

But real forgiveness comes only with a third real/objective thing, i.e. objective repentance!

So, we have these three: real guilt, real forgiveness, with real repentance!

But, turning back to objective/real guilt – we have to say that you & I will not have an idea of how much guilt we have incurred in our lifetime.

And so, we might well be like the rich young ruler¹⁰ who just happily went through life assuming that he had kept God's Law perfectly! He didn't *feel* guilty! So, he didn't think he had broken any law!

But *so* he thought, until he came to Jesus!

And what did he hear?

Well, that he had stumbled over the very first commandment – i.e. that he loved his possessions more than God!

⁸ In Hebrew, *ʾāvōn* (אָוֹן) iniquity, guilt or punishment of iniquity (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (p. 730). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ps 32:5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁰ Cf. Mk 10:17-27 (and parallels)

So, the rich young ruler didn't *feel* guilty, but he *was*!
 But look at this beautiful thing – i.e. the way in which Christ revealed this man's guilt to him.
 You see, instead of showing this man – all at once – the whole gamut of his guilt, Christ graciously led him to see just a part!
 My brother & sister, what would happen if, suddenly and in one go, you & I were to see the whole measure of our sin & guilt!?
 Wow! It would destroy us! You & I would collapse under the weight of it!
 Just remember how *Isaiah* reacted when he saw the Glory of God filling the temple! He said, "***Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!***"¹¹
 Just imagine those who deny their guilt now – who don't want to know about God; who don't want to hear that they're guilty – that they need to repent! Imagine what will happen on the Last Day when, suddenly, they will appear before the Judge of heaven and earth, and He lays out for them the full measure of their guilt! Certainly, every mouth will be stopped! They won't be able to talk back to God saying, "But we didn't *feel* guilty!"
 So, what will they do? Well, they will only be able to cry out, "Mountains, fall on us!" "Get us out of God's sight!"
 Will they be able to reject God's verdict, and appeal to a higher court?
 No, for there is no higher court than the Judge of heaven & earth!
 See the objective reality of their guilt!?
 And that would be *you & I* if we were not in Jesus Christ!
 Well, so far, we have been reminded that *sin* is a reality and that *guilt* is reality!
 So, what's the logical next reality?
 That brings us to point 2...

Wrath

My brother & sister, RC Sproul reminds us of those godly preachers of the Great Awakening of the 1700's!¹²
 They did not shy away from preaching the Biblical message of the wrath of a Holy God – His wrath against sin and unrepentant sinners!
 In this regard, Jonathan Edward's sermon, "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God," has become well-known.
 Of course, even in that same sermon, Edwards did not just preach "hellfire & damnation" as some have mocked! No, that very same sermon proclaimed God's *grace* over sinners who repent!
 But the world reacted to these preachers by saying they had a "scare theology" and that they preached that "Man is very bad and God is very mad!"
 Well, the next century (1800's) saw a heavy reaction to the preaching of those godly men and their Biblical message.
 You see, it was the rise of liberalism in Europe. Many theologians started denying the supernatural, the atonement of sin, the doctrine of original sin, and God's... *wrath*!
 So, this was what they were now saying: "Man is *not* so bad, and God is *not* so mad!"
 And this was their thinking: Wrath is in & of itself a *bad* thing. So, because wrath is a *bad* thing, it is beneath God's dignity to be wrathful. If God ever became angry, He could not

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Is 6:5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹² George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley

be God!¹³ (Of course, they forgot that God's anger is vastly different from petty & selfish human anger. God's anger is after all a holy and "composed" anger.)

So, what do we see in liberalism?

Well, we see that, just as sinful man denies the objectivity of *guilt*, so they now also came to deny the objectivity and reality of God's *wrath* over sin!

"Yes," said they, "*salvation* – that is from the Lord, but not *wrath*!"

Well, if that were so, here's the logical question: What does God then save us from? If God's wrath does not exist, why did God then send His Son to die for our sins?

My brother & sister, it was also in the 1800's that the liberals rejoiced in the words of the Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche when he declared that God is dead!

Why did the liberals rejoice?

Well, because, if God is dead, then, so they thought, the church would no longer be able to hinder the progress of science, economics or world civilization! And if the church's influence is diminished over all these areas, then more education, technology and human expertise would usher in a new world order of peace among all nations!

Then, to their shock came WW-I, which they had hoped would be the end of all wars. But that war didn't cure humanity's ills!

And then came even WW-II after which a great pessimism arose among humanists! They said that life is meaningless, and that nobody is "home" out there!

It was then that the Philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, remembered Nietzsche's words that "God is dead."

Thus, said Sartre, if there is no God, then I am a mere cosmic accident who has emerged from the slime. Then I have come from nothingness and I'm inevitably just heading into future nothingness! So, then my origin and future are meaningless – and so is my whole life in-between.¹⁴

You say, "But, what has all of this got to do with God's wrath?"

Well, I like the way RC Sproul has summed up the implication of Sartre's words and of those of his colleagues, i.e. that "if I am not ultimately *accountable*, then ultimately I do not *count*!"¹⁵

My brother & sister, see how the unbeliever's reasoning is hopeless – comes to a dead-end street!?

If I'm not accountable to God, then ultimately, I do not count!

Why not believe the Bible? After all, its message is clear: Paul, who himself had seen the risen Lord (!), says (in 1 Thess 1:10) that the Christian *waits for God's Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*¹⁶

See? God saves us, in Christ, from His own judgement and wrath!

And our NT passage, too, tells us our Lord Jesus Himself said that a day of judgement is coming on which people will give account for their sins!¹⁷

Indeed, if you don't believe in God's wrath, then you simply cannot be a Christian! God's wrath is an integral part of a Biblical faith!

¹³ Cf. Sproul (ibid:196)

¹⁴ Cf. Sproul (ibid:197)

¹⁵ Cf. Sproul (ibid:197)

¹⁶ Cf. 1 Thess 1:9-10 for the fuller context, "***For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.***"

¹⁷ Cf. Mt 12:36-37 "***I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak,³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.***"

And you cannot be a Christian if you don't believe in the cross, for look, is not the cross of Christ the purest demonstration of the wrath of God!?

My brother & sister, the reason why you & I run to the cross and cling to it, is because it is there that God's wrath and love were seen in one go! So great was His *wrath* over your & my sins that, in *love* for us, He reckoned our sins to His Son's account – His very own Son who could endure God's wrath and still rise up from it!

And, from the beginning, Jesus knew what He was in for! Yet, *so much did He love us* that He willingly obeyed His Father!

So, do I count anything in the eyes of God?

Absolutely – especially now that His Son has paid for my sins!

Is life worth the living? Absolutely! I can now have a meaningful and joyful life, and have it to the full!

But here's the flipside of this Good News – reminds WCF 6.6. – that those who did not receive Jesus Christ, God's love gift, they will be bound over to holy wrath¹⁸ of God and the curse of the law.

Question: Have you received Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord!?

AMEN (2,443 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁸ Not just any wrath/anger – not petty human anger. No, *holy* wrath of God!