

Session 3

March 21, 2021

THE NATURE OF SIN

Isaiah 59:1-13

Various spokesmen through the years have noted the “softening of language” regarding sin in the various Baptist statements of faith. Southern Seminary’s *Abstract of Principles* back in 1858 proposed that individuals “inherit a nature corrupt and wholly opposed to God and His law.” Later on, the *Baptist Faith and Message* of 1925 stated that individuals “inherit a nature corrupt and in bondage to sin.” The 1963 edition revised the wording and said that people “inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin.” That’s a pretty big shift, from a nature “corrupt” with sin to a nature “inclined” toward sin!

Whether the sinfulness of sin was intentionally softened or not, the Bible’s tone toward it has never wavered. God hates it! And few passages in Scripture paint a more drastic portrait of sin and a sinful nation as does Isaiah 59.

Sin separates us from God (vv. 1-5). The most startling feature of these first verses is God’s willful refusal to listen to a sinful nation. It’s not that He lacks the ability to save or is suddenly unable to hear the petitions of His people (v. 1). Rather the breadth and depth of the nation’s sin has made God such a stranger, that He turns His face away, and chooses *not to* listen (v. 2)! This seems a shock to those who see only the loving and compassionate side of God. But God is at the same time holy and just. We must keep in mind that this is not His response to those who cry out in repentance and faith, but to those characterized by blatant *crookedness* (iniquity) and open *sin* (v. 2). While the first few verses describe God’s reaction to sin, verses 3-5 describe *why* God has reacted this way. Hands and fingers are defiled by blood and iniquity. These depict *violent actions*. Lips and tongues utter lies and perversities. These depict a *corrupt testimony*. What is worse, according to verse 4, is that the wicked look for new ways to sin! “They conceive trouble and give birth to iniquity.” Verse 5 is particularly illustrative. Rather than crushing the eggs of the venomous viper, they choose to hatch them out! Rather than pulling down the snare of the spider’s web, they weave their own types of traps to ensnare the innocent. For reflection: *While the context of the sinfulness describes the nation of Israel, how do these principles apply to individuals living in blatant sin?*

Sin puts us at odds with God (vv. 6-8). Unfortunately, good works cannot make up for a depraved people. Just as a spider’s weaving is no substitute for cloth, good works are no substitute for righteousness (v. 6). The works that sinners produce are themselves sinful. (see Is. 64:6). The hands and feet (v. 6-7) indicate *sinful actions*, while the thoughts maintain a *sinful attitude*. The lifestyle they chose could not bring peace (v. 8), and they left those who followed after them an equally crooked path. All of these characteristics indicate not only how far the sinful nation had strayed from God, but in what direction. For reflection: *Dr. Adrian Rogers used to say, “The worst form of badness is human goodness.” What do you think he meant by that? How does that apply in this context?*

Sin makes us miserable without God (vv. 9-13). There’s a popular bumper sticker out there that says, “No God, no peace. *Know* God, *know* peace.” The little play on words is surprisingly accurate. Sometimes we get the idea that if we just got our way, we would be happy. In reality,

any path we choose apart from God leads to destruction (see Prov. 14:12). The remaining verses in our text remind us of the consequences of sin. We long for justice and light (v. 9) but can't find it. We seek clarity and purpose, but instead we grope and stumble along (v. 10). We moan and we groan about our circumstances and situations (v. 11) but can't seem to find God. Why? Because of the multiplication of sin and our willful participation in it (v. 12). For reflection: *So, what is the solution to sin's dilemma? How does a people so far from God find their way back?*