

SOS Series: Is My Sin Really Such A Big Deal?

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A small country church was replacing its old wooden pews. They were rustic, straight-backed, un-cushioned; and the congregation was tired of squirming and wriggling in discomfort. A committee excitedly began researching modern, much more comfortable pews. But they were shocked, the next Sunday, to see a brand-new set of rustic, straight-backed, un-cushioned pews already installed in the church. "Where did these pews come from?" they asked the old pastor. "Well," he said, "I saw the fancy pews you folks were looking at. And I was afraid for your souls. So I ordered these. Don't ever get too comfortable in the presence of your God."

Now, as your pastor, I don't have any problem with the pews you're sitting in. But I do agree with that country preacher's basic message. Don't get too comfortable here. Especially, the Bible warns us, don't get too comfortable, when it comes to sin.

Our question for today is this: Is my sin really such a big deal? We all know there are big, horrible, heinous things going on in our world – shocking examples of sin and evil. But what about my sins? And your sins? Most of us are not doing anything all that horrific.

The truth is, most of us are pretty comfortable with the little sins in our lives. We say things, we do things, we think things that we know are wrong. We know they're not acceptable to God. But we're so accustomed to these kinds of sins. "They're just everyday habits," we say, "familiar, routine, normal, little sins." Is my sin really such a big deal?

The Word of God's answer? A resounding "Yes!" Yes, sin is a very big deal, in my life, and in yours, says the Lord.

Did you ever notice, in Bible story after Bible story, how when God holds people accountable for their sin, it's never just a slap on the wrist? It's never a tsk-tsk, or a gentle admonition. When God holds people accountable for sin? It's always hard-core! Remember the curse on Adam and Eve? The punishment for murderous Cain? The flood dumped on the sinful people of Noah's day? The devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah? The plagues on Egypt?

Why does our God get so worked up over human sin? Why is our sin such a big deal? Is God just vengeful? Vindictive? Mean?

No, I would say God is realistic. When God sees his people sinning, disobeying, disregarding his commands, he's realistic about what's happening. God sees the reality of what's happening when I sin.

Sin separates. Sin always separates us from God. God is perfect and holy, in every way. And when we sin, we cut ourselves off from him. The punishment for sin, God tells Adam back in the Garden of Eden, is that separation. "In the day you eat of that forbidden fruit," he says, "you will surely die." Physical death? Well, eventually. But spiritual death is what God is talking about. Separation from God. Sin removes us from his holy, life-giving presence, and destroys all chance of spiritual life with God.

That's what's going on in today's Old Testament Lesson. Joshua and the people of Israel are fighting to reclaim the land of their forefathers. But one of the soldiers disobeys God's command. He sins by grabbing for himself some of the gold and silver from a conquered city. And God holds the Israelite nation accountable for that sin. He stops fighting for

them, and says, "I will be with you no more. I'll have to be separate from you," God says, "Unless you get rid of that sin -- the gold and silver, and the sinner -- in your midst."

Sin is always a big deal to God.

Even when it's a Christian who's sinning. Even when it's a person with rock-solid faith in Jesus Christ. We all come here and confess our sins; and we're assured, week after week, that our sin is truly forgiven by trusting in Christ's sacrifice. Our faith tells us that, on the cross, God laid all the punishment for sin on his Son. Our wonderful Christian faith tells us that our salvation is secure, if our faith is grounded on Christ, and that nothing in this world can ever separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus. That's all true. That's all straight from the Bible. That's our blessed, awesome Christian faith.

But isn't it also true that, sometimes, we can get too comfortable in that faith? Isn't it true that, sometimes, we take our forgiveness for granted? Sometimes, don't we wonder, "If I'm forgiven by Christ, if God doesn't count my sins against me because of Jesus, so what if I do sin? It's not such a big deal."

God says to us today, "Yes, it is! Don't get too comfortable. You're playing with fire, when it comes to sin. Sin is ultra-dangerous."

Again, here's why. Sin separates. Sin pulls us away from our God, and draws us away from our faith. Sin – whether it's those comfortable little habitual sins, or whether it's the original sin that's inborn in our human nature – sin inevitably undercuts our faith. Whether I grasp this or not, the reality is that sin in my life puts my faith in peril. Sin, in your life, endangers your faith.

Because this saving faith of ours -- this glorious faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin – is not impervious to damage or decay. Faith can weaken. Faith can diminish. Faith can be lost entirely. Have you ever known a Christian who just fades away from church, from worship; and, ultimately loses faith, loses belief? I have. It happens easily. And sometimes I think that it happens easiest when we allow ourselves to get too comfortable.

So what do we do? Buy less comfortable pews for the church, right? No, but let's all make a promise today. I'm going to take a fresh look, an honest and realistic look, at the sin in my life. I'm going to pay attention to the danger of my sin unaddressed, my sin unrepented; and see in what peril such sin can put my faith. Will you make that promise with me?

Now make one more. Promise, after you're confronted with the reality and the danger of your sin, you'll look to the Lord for his answer to our SOS. "Save our souls," we cry, as sinners. And that's exactly what God has done for us, in Christ. You are saved. You are forgiven. Now don't get too comfortable. Guard against sin, and know that God is always on your side. Amen.