

Built from 100% Recycled Sin
Galatians 5:13-15, Romans 6:8-14

Friends, how would you evaluate 2012 in terms of relationships? Was this a year where new relationships were formed? Was this a year where your existing relationships were nurtured and grew stronger and deeper as a result?

Or as you look back would you conclude that many of those new relationships are really just superficial connections, and some of your existing relationships didn't get any deeper at all, and in fact the events of 2012 actually strained some relationships.

And perhaps there were relationships which ended in 2012; maybe there are people you no longer speak with, people who are no longer a part of your life.

And if we widen the scope of that question and apply it to our communities, our businesses, our cities, our governments, races and nations... what might we conclude about 2012?

Do we really know the people who live next door to us, or in our neighborhoods? What kind of a year was it for the relationships between business owners and employees?

What is the relationship between City Hall and the citizens of Calgary like? How do things stand between the Provincial Government and Albertans? What about the Premier of Alberta and B.C.?

How are things going between Native Canadians and the Federal Government, between Republicans and Democrats, between the State of Israel and Hamas?

And what if we widened the scope of that question even more and applied it to our planet? What's the relationship like between humanity and nature?

And finally we could open up that question all the way and ask "what was humanity's relationship like with God in 2012, both on a corporate and personal level?"

And friends I'm asking us to give these questions some reflection this morning because I know - that in all of these areas... we will be aware of instances where relationships are strained, deteriorating, or have broken down completely...

And it is in these instances friends... in the superficial and casual relationships, the quarrels and bickering, the divorces, the labor disputes, the political polarization, the sabre rattling and terrorism – where the reality of Sin is manifested and touches us personally.

A comprehensive definitive of Sin might be hard to formulate, but its consequences are easy to point out. Sin destroys relationships and wrecks community.

Of course our experience in this simply echoes the truth of what the scriptures reveal to us in Genesis 3.

When Adam and Eve disobey God's command and eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil the consequences are relational...

Gen 3:7 "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."

Adam and Eve's harmonious and mutually fulfilling relationship is interrupted when they notice each other's nakedness... now they feel shameful, exposed, vulnerable and inadequate in front of each other – the consequence of Sin.

Gen 3:8 "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Adam and Eve used to enjoy a trusting, unassuming, innocent relationship with an all-powerful being who created everything and gave them everything... but now, the naked truth of how this divine being is so much greater - overwhelms them.

Now they are afraid of Him and they so run and hide from the one they know as creator, Yahweh – because of Sin

Friends, Sin destroys relationships – but not by annihilation... instead Sin twists them and turns them into something they weren't before... and this reveals an important characteristic about sin that we need to understand.

Sin is parasitical. Its existence depends on being able to twist and warp things into what they weren't intended to be. Into that which brings about suffering, pain, suspicion, agony... death.

Yahweh who they used to know as Creator, sustainer, and provider must now become their judge. They have broken the stipulations of the "Covenant of Creation" and now Yahweh must articulate what was meant when He warned Adam *"when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen 2:17)*

So the Yahweh the judge must hand down the sentence, Adam and Eve will experience the consequences of Sin

twisting and warping what they would have experienced as good in their relationship with each other, and in their relationship with the creation and in their relationship with God

So to Eve He says...

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

Do you see how Sin twists and warps things? Pain in childbearing, we take that as normal... but originally it wasn't.

Woman desiring man – either to manipulate or perversely to be dominated by them, and the man abusing his leadership in relation to the woman... the battle of the sexes isn't normal, not originally

And to Adam He says...

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns

and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Man vs. nature, having to fight against the elements to scratch out a living out of the unyielding soil – that’s not normal either... not originally. Humans will now experience working the ground to grow food as “frustrating toil” and eventually that ground will swallow them when they die. The life it gives will not sustain forever.

Are you beginning to see how Sin is Parasitical? How it destroys relationships by twisting them so they become antagonistic instead of mutually beneficial?

Man vs. woman, humans vs. nature, humanity against God...

And in being a parasite we need to realize that Sin does not introduce anything new – it does not create, it cannot bring

anything into existence that was not there before like the Creator can.

Even the Devil who leads Eve and Adam into rebellion is portrayed as part of the creation; He is called “The Serpent.”

He is a creature – twisted into an agent of rebellion by Sin, damned by God to his fate... but a creature still, originally created by Yahweh as the highest of all angels, Lucifer the Light bearer, the worship leader of heaven.

So friends, we need to realize there is no grand struggle between two equal but opposing sides of good and evil in our world that somehow need each other, e.i. you can’t have the good without the bad... though at first glance it might seem that way.

In actuality it is Sin at work warping and twisting everything – sometimes subtly, sometime grotesquely but still warping things, deviating them from God’s original intentions.

And friends we even experience this in our relationships in the church don't we?

Certainly that's why the Apostle Paul was writing to the Galatian church and warning them that if they indulged their sinful nature it would destroy the congregation.

He says *"if you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other"*

Friends, we still wrestle with our sinful natures, even as followers of Jesus Christ, no matter how long we've been Christians.

And Sin is so subtle and it's so sneaky and deceptive that it twists and warps our good desire to follow the rules and do good things that honor God, and perverts that it into legalism...

and that causes us to become critical and judgmental of how Sin affects our fellow Christians and non-Christians.

And a Church is destroyed by that... yes it may continue to exist as an organization for many years... but what Christ meant it to be has been destroyed, it is no longer a Christian community.

And friends that's an important warning for us here at Valleyview to heed - because last year we made the intentional decision to change the descriptor in our name from Presbyterian to Community.

Because in truth being "Presbyterian" is all about community – not only because we're commissioned by Christ to bring the gospel to the community He's placed us in – but also because the word "Presbyterian" is the Greek word the bible uses for the "elders" who lead the church community and its ministry.

In James 5:13 It says *"Is anyone of you sick? He should call the "Presbyterians" of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil."* And in verse 16 James says *"confess your sins to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*

The point is friends that Christ wants Christian Community to be a place where relationships, that are twisted and warped by Sin, can be healed, transformed, restored, where new community is built.

This is why we are a “community” church – because ministry and administry are a group thing, we do it together.

And so part of ministering to our “Surrounding Community” is modeling authentic “Christian Community” - working together to bring the gospel... but that requires we know how to deal with Sin which seeks to twist and destroy Christian Community and make it judgmental instead.

That’s why understanding Sin is so important, so that we don’t make the cure worse than the disease.

And that means first and foremost understanding that Sin is not a list of rules that you break, it’s a state of being.

In fact you don’t have to choose to break any rules to be a sinner. King David confesses in Psalm 51:5 *“surely I was sinful when my mother conceived me”*

You see friends, sinful behaviors are symptoms of Sin that appear later on, in the same way that you start feeling achy and sore, and begin coughing and sneezing after you’ve been infected with the flu virus.

So this is why it doesn’t work to simply tell people “behave differently” when dealing with sin. It’s why a list of do’s and don’ts may help keep us polite and civil with each other, and keep our behavior in line....

But Sin will just pop up somewhere else – like those Whack-a-moles at the Stampede – because we’re only focused on keeping the symptoms in line and not addressing the underlying cause.

And what's the underlying cause? Well friends, that's why we looked in depth at Gen 3 this morning – to discover that “the underlying cause” is Sin twisting what is good.

The solution of course is what we just spent the month of December anticipating, and two weeks holidays celebrating... The birth of Jesus Christ!

Jesus took on human nature and redeemed it from Sin – He got rid of the parasite that was twisting it and destroying it.

In his death and resurrection He paid the penalty for the offence which our Sinful state gives to God, and when He ascended to Heaven He sent the Holy Spirit to empower those who have been forgiven to continue His work of redemption.

So if I was to put that into everyday language... Jesus wants His church to tell others they can be forgiven, and also help people recycle their sin.

Friends we are to take the very things which destroy relationships, which destroy community and through the power of the Holy Spirit recycle them – unwarp and untwist them and use them to build community – Christian community.

So... over the next seven weeks we're going to explore a list of sinful behaviors which has been used over the centuries to instruct Christians on what to avoid – things like pride, envy, sloth, gluttony, greed, lust, and anger...

Except instead of focusing exclusively on what sorts of things constitute pride and then encouraging us to be humble instead...

we want to look at what good thing is being twisted in pride, or in anger, or in sloth... and how might that be redeemed. And seek the scripture's wisdom on how we might recycle it so that instead of it destroying community, it can help us build community.

You see friends, this is the actual and very practical way that we carry out what the scripture instructs us to do in Romans 6:13 *“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God”*

So friends, are you up for it? Jesus believes you are!

In John 14:12-13 Jesus says ¹²*“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”*¹³ *And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.*¹⁴ *You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”*

So friends, let's ask our Lord and Savior, who gave his life to redeem every part of God's good creation from Sin, to help us continue that work in the weeks ahead... and trust that He will.

Let's pray.