SESSION 6: Why the Cross?

PART 1
Essential Truths
Week 6: Why the Cross, Part 1

Last Week: Jesus Is ___________ and ___________

This Week: The Cross is ______________ to our human problem of ____

Why discuss sin?
Because if we ____________________________, we can’t find ________.

1. Sin defined: Sin is ____________________________________________.

2. Sin impacts 4 core relationships:
   - My relationship with ______________.
   - My relationship with ______________.
   - My relationship with ______________.
   - My relationship with ______________.

3. Sin impacts my relationship with God.
   “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 2 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”” - Genesis 3:8-9 (ESV)

4. Sin impacts my relationship with others.
   “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.” - Titus 3:3 (ESV)

5. Sin impacts my relationship with Creation.
   “And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. 2 The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered.” - Genesis 9:1-2 (ESV)

   “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” - Romans 7:18-19 (ESV)

When we see the destructive nature of sin, it should move us to ___________ and to _____________________.

Thank God for the cure – The Cross of Jesus Christ.

Next Steps
• Watch Week 6 video: click on BE ONE Essentials at bethanychurch.com
• Complete the homework: Session 6 Sermon Notes & Lesson Handout
• Discuss in a Connect Group or one-on-one
• Come to church next Sunday for Session 7
Why the Cross?
The Cross is God’s solution to our human problem of sin.

The symbol of the Cross has become a universal symbol of the Christian faith. To those of us who follow Jesus, this symbol carries a deep, life-altering meaning. When Jesus died on the cross, He changed everything for us, for all human beings for all time. Through this cross, Jesus provides God’s solution to the human problem. In this session, then, we will explore the human problem, and, in our next session, we will examine how the cross addresses this problem.

1. A Problem with God

   The First Sin

   • The First Temptation
     The ultimate human problem is sin. In the Bible, “sin” has many layers of meaning, but it essentially describes our failure to love and obey God faithfully. God created us in love, but we reject His love and instead live as if He has no claim on us.

     The Book of Genesis tells us the story of how sin entered the world. It came through the first human couple that God created, Adam and Eve. God had given Adam only one commandment:

     “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” (Genesis 2:16-17)

     This tree was clearly more than an ordinary tree. God gave it a sacred significance. Its fruit offered intoxicating powers and possibilities. Eating its fruit might lead one into new levels of excitement and pleasure, beyond the life that God provided in His garden. If everything in God’s garden was good, one might wonder what life would be like if there was another option. What about this option of evil? Would we really die like God says we will?
A tempter appears in the garden in the form of a serpent, to press this very question. He first invites the woman to consider the possibilities of life outside of God's command:

“'You will not certainly die,' the serpent said to the woman. 'For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'” (Genesis 3:4-5)

• The Root of Sin
This lie that the tempter tells reveals the real root of sin. It is our human desire to reject God's ways in order to pursue our own ways. The apostle James states this fact clearly:

“...[E]ach person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” (James 1:14-15)

Because sin is contrary to what God desires for us, it will eventually cause our death. The apostle Paul concisely makes this point. He says:

“For the wages of sin is death....” (Romans 6:23)

As God warned Adam from the very beginning, death is the inevitable result of our decision to reject God and His ways.

All Sin
So sin enters the world when the first man and woman make this fatal decision, and once sin enters, it never leaves. Generation after generation has followed in the misdirected footsteps of this first couple. Paul says:

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned....” (Romans 5:12)

Earlier in the same letter, the apostle says:

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....” (Romans 3:23)

And, centuries before that, the prophet Isaiah declared that:

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way....” (Isaiah 53:6)

All Die

• Physical Death
Because we all sin, then, we are all destined to die. Death in the scriptures has two different shades of meaning. Sometimes the emphasis is on physical death, the death of our bodies. So, for example, the writer to the Hebrews says:
“…[P]eople are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27)

Physical death becomes the norm for all who now live as creatures on this planet. Although God originally created human beings to dwell with Him forever, sin has introduced a time-limit to our earthly existence. After the first man and woman introduce sin into the world, God declares the unavoidable nature of this new limit: 

“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.” (Genesis 3:19)

After sin enters, human beings are now at war with their natural environment. They will no longer live in a friendly garden, but in a hostile world where they must struggle to survive. And, in the end, they will lose that struggle and return to the dust. Not a very desirable end, is it?

• Spiritual Death

As bad as this might be, however, there is another level of death that is even more terrifying. Scripture speaks of a spiritual death that has eternal consequences. Often this eternal death is described as “hell”. For example, Jesus says:

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)

Hell is described as a place of eternal and conscious torment. Jesus refers to it as “the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” (Matthew 8:12) as a place “where the fire never goes out,” (Mark 9:43) and “where the worms that eat [the rebellious] do not die, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:48)

In the Book of Revelation, Hell is also called the “second death”, indicating that it will never end. So, for example, we read that:

“…[T]he cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8)

And Paul repeats a similar idea when he says:

“They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.…” (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

• Hell and a Loving God?

Obviously, these are severe and harsh warnings, and they seem difficult to reconcile with the notion of a loving and caring Heavenly Father. We must remember, however, that God in His Holiness cannot allow sin in His presence. Sinful people cannot survive in His presence. Recall, for example, what happened when the prophet, Isaiah, entered the presence of God. He saw a host of angelic creatures above the throne of God calling out these words:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory. At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. Woe to me! I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.’” (Isaiah 6:3-5)

Isaiah experienced firsthand the terror that overcomes us when our sin meets God’s pure holiness. This, then, is the real tragedy of sin. It separates us from God, now and forever.
2. A Problem with Others

1 The First Broken Relationship

Since sin separates us from God, it will certainly affect our relationship with others. The Genesis story indicates that a broken human relationship was the first sign that sin had entered the world. The story says:

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 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.” (Genesis 3:6-7)

The first couple had to protect themselves, since now, their desires for one another were no longer pure. They could now hurt and use one another. Their sinful desires have left them dangerously exposed and vulnerable to one another.

2 Continued Brokenness

• Brokenness in the Old Testament

The brokenness of this first human relationship quickly spreads to the children that this relationship produces. One generation later, Cain kills his brother, Abel. (Genesis 4:8) From this sad beginning, then, evil quickly increases until families, tribes and nations start to divide and decline. The prophets often lament this brokenness. Jeremiah, for example, cries over the city of Jerusalem, saying:

“Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers there is no one to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.” (Lamentations 1:2)

And the prophet, Micah, declares:

“Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even with the woman who lies in your embrace guard the words of your lips. For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies are the members of his own household.” (Micah 7:5-6)

• Brokenness in the New Testament

This same point is made in the New Testament. Paul, for example, points out to the church at Corinth that their broken relationships are showing their evil side. He says:

“You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?” (1 Corinthians 3:3)

And, in his letter to the Romans, he writes:

“Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they 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. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. 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.” (Romans 1:28-32)

Here we see the explicit statement that separation from God causes all kinds of harmful and hurtful effects on human relationships.

3. A Problem within Us

So here is the brutal, devastating truth. The extent and depth of this sin problem has left us powerless to correct it by ourselves. Left on our own, our destiny is eternal destruction. Our own desires work against us. Paul says:

“For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death.” (Romans 7:5)

These passions that lead to death are part of our inherited sinful nature. Again, Paul says:

“For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.” (Romans 7:18-19)

So, he adds:

“...[I]n my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.” (Romans 7:25)

Trapped as we are in our own sinful nature, we must cry out as the apostle does:

“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (Romans 7:24)

But then he quickly answers his own question. He says:

“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25)

Conclusion

In our next session, we will examine how the cross of Jesus addresses this human problem of sin, a problem with God, with others and within ourselves. But in the meantime, may God reward you and bless you as you continue your spiritual journey.
Discussion Questions

Why the Cross?

After completing Session 6, Why the Cross? Part 1, you can use the following questions to encourage discussion within your group.

The Cross is God’s solution to our human problem of sin.

Opening

For those who follow Jesus, the cross has for centuries carried a deep, life-altering meaning. As a result, it has been displayed around the world in many different forms. Do you find deep meaning in the cross? If so, what are some ways you incorporate this meaningful symbol in your life?

Going Deeper

1. A Problem with God

 ✓ Deep down, why do you do what you? For those times you reject God’s ways in order to pursue your own ways, what is your motivation or desire to do so?

 ✓ Since Adam’s first sin in the garden, every succeeding generation has sinned. In what ways have you seen sin impact your family over generations? What steps have you taken to stop these destructive patterns of sin?

 ✓ There are many different interpretations and beliefs about hell in our culture today. What have you been taught or what beliefs have you held concerning hell?

 ✓ The Bible is very descriptive about what hell is. Based off the scripture we just read, what is the Bible’s definition of hell?

 ✓ Why is the real tragedy of sin separation from God forever?

2. A Problem with Others

 ✓ Why do you believe sin causes broken relationships?

 ✓ Sin can cause all kinds of harmful and hurtful effects on human relationships. How have you seen sin affect your relationships with others?

3. A Problem within Us

 ✓ The Bible teaches that the extent and depth of this sin problem has left everyone powerless to correct it themselves. Do you find yourself relating to Paul when he writes, “For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.”? How do you find yourself reacting in a situation like this?

 ✓ We are given a brief glimpse in this session where we can turn when we find ourselves doing evil when we want to be doing good. What are some ways we can remember to turn to Jesus in these times?

Next Steps

Spend time this week in prayer, confessing those areas in your life where sin still reigns. Accept God’s forgiveness for these errors, and then work with His Spirit as He heals you from the harmful effects of that sin has caused.