

# A Bad Record and a Bad Heart

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Problems, Problems, Problems!

Often it seems that life in this world is nothing but one problem after another. We have different kinds of problems—family problems, money problems, health problems, job problems—but we all have problems.

And we all try to solve these problems. We see a counselor about our family problems; we look for another job if we are in financial trouble; we go to the doctor about our health; we do everything we can to improve our condition.

There is one problem, however, which is far greater than any other. And failing to solve it is more tragic than sickness or poverty or hardship. Yet most of mankind has never done anything about it.

This is the twofold problem of *a bad record and a bad heart*. God has declared that every man, woman, boy, and girl has this problem.

Your efforts to overcome problems with your family, money, and health are important, but finding the way to clear your terrible record in God's court and to change the depravity of your heart is all important and even fundamental to overcoming your other problems. Ultimately, if you do not face the problem of your bad record and bad heart and find its solution, *it would be better for you that you had never been born*.

Out of concern for your present and eternal welfare, consider the nature of your greatest problem in order that you may find its only solution.

## A Bad Record

Every human being in this world has a bad record in heaven, unless, of course, it has been graciously cleared by God himself. God has said that "all are under sin" and "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:9-10).

As creatures made by God, we are accountable to God. We are not only subject to his laws which govern the physical universe, such as the law of gravity, but we are also subject to his moral laws. We did not choose to be his subjects, but that does not change our accountability to him. He is God, and we are his creatures.

Our accountability to God is similar to our accountability to our nation. When you are born, you immediately become subject to the laws of your homeland. Thus, if you refuse to pay taxes, or if you steal somebody's property, or if you assault someone, and you get caught, you will be held responsible for your criminal activity. The civil authorities will see that you are tried, sentenced, and punished accordingly. You will not be able to get away with your crime by complaining that you never agreed to the laws. The bottom line is not your agreement to or feelings about the laws of the land but your accountability to the authority under which you live.

Now you must face not only the reality that you are a creature made by God and accountable to God, but also the fact that you have sinned against God and that God has judged you to be worthy of eternal punishment for your sins. This is the first part of your greatest problem, you have a bad record before God, a record for which God will damn you on the day of judgment unless it is lawfully cleared.

The God who made you and to whom you are accountable knows you through and through. The Bible teaches us that "there is no created thing that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). God sees everything you do, whether in public or in secret. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch upon the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3).

Furthermore, this same God keeps a careful record of every deviation you make from his moral law. He takes note of every moral deviation in thought, in word, in attitude, and in deed. And the Scripture tells us that in the day of judgment the books which contain such records will be opened and you shall be judged by what is written in them. "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire. And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11-15). Now, does not God's knowledge of your sins and God's determination to judge you for your sins cause you to tremble?

Consider the breadth and depth of your sin against God and his law. In the Ten Commandments he has commanded you to love him with your whole being, to have no other gods before him, to worship and serve him according to his revealed will and not according to human imaginations, to hallow his name and his word, to set apart and keep his appointed day of worship and rest from your work, to honor his appointed government (father, mother or anyone else that God has put in authority over you), not to murder nor hate, not to commit adultery nor lust, not to steal, not to lie, and not even to desire in your heart what God forbids (Exodus 20:1-17). When someone asked Jesus what was the great commandment in the law, he replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). According to the Scripture, do you not stand condemned by God for breaking his commandments? You may have a clean police record on earth, but you have a criminal record in heaven.

Moreover, what makes this problem so bad is that you cannot do anything to change your record; only God can deal with your bad record. You cannot sneak into the court of heaven and tamper with the records. You cannot fool God into thinking that he made a mistake in judging you to be a hell-deserving sinner by pleading your external morality or religious activity. The court of heaven cannot be bribed. God requires that sin be paid for in full: “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). God’s holy law must be satisfied or else God would not be just.

If you ever truly face the seriousness of this problem, it will make all other problems in life appear small. You will cry out to God and plead for mercy. Indeed, there is mercy with God in the gospel. In the gospel God sovereignly and graciously clears sinners of their guilty records and satisfies the demand of his justice by punishing a substitute who bears their sins.

But before considering the gospel solution to your dilemma, we need to consider the other side of this problem also. You not only have a bad record in heaven, but you also have a bad heart on earth.

#### A Bad Heart

In the Scriptures God plainly declares that the hearts of all men are bad. Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately wicked.” In another place we read that “the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart” (Ecclesiastes 9:3). Furthermore, Jesus plainly taught that the source of evil is rooted in the hearts of men. He said, “For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man” (Mark 7:21-23). Sin is not created by the environment. Sin comes from out of the bad heart of man! This is the other aspect of your greatest problem, an incorrigible, sin-loving, God-hating heart, which is at enmity with God and is not subject to the law of God and cannot be (Romans 8:7).

You probably do not consider yourself to be as bad as the Bible says you are because your heart is deceitful. It is masterful not only at deceiving others but at deceiving you. With complete disregard of God’s description of your terrible condition, your heart will deceive you into thinking that you are not really that bad. It will tell you that deep down you are “OK”, not perfect, but “OK.” But do you not see that this very response is evidence of a wicked heart? Your conscience should affirm the very truths revealed by God; but instead it denies, distorts, and covers them over with lies. Furthermore, is it not true that the things that God forbids you to do are the very things that you love and do? And are not the things that God commands you to do the very things that you hate and will not do?

This indeed is a problem, for how can you live in heaven with a bad heart? Heaven would be like hell for you, for there you will not find anything that will feed your sinful cravings. Worshipping God and living for him is heaven’s lifestyle. Would this not bore you (even frustrate and infuriate you) if you remain with a heart set against God and his will? Furthermore, God will never allow you to enter his kingdom as a rebel sinner. God brings into his kingdom forgiven sinners with purified hearts, but never rebel sinners with corrupt hearts.

Now what makes this part of your problem so great is that you cannot change your heart. God’s Word says, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23). The obvious answer to this rhetorical question is “No.” A man or an animal cannot change his coloring; it is part of his nature. Similarly, men with bad hearts cannot do good because it is contrary to their nature. Yes, it is true that you may be able to change some of your external conduct, but you cannot

change the disposition of your heart. A man may be able to keep from having sex outside of marriage, but in his heart he still will lust. A man may resolve to go to church and tithe, but in his heart he still will be far from God. A woman may restrain her lips from speaking slander and lies, yet she will not be able to keep from hating in her heart.

This is the second aspect of your greatest problem, you not only have a bad record in heaven which you cannot change, but you also have a bad heart on earth which you cannot change. Unless you face this bad news, you will never understand the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is good news only to those who have come to realize that they are utterly helpless in their wretched condition as sinners.

#### A Cleared Record and A Changed Heart

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news about what God in sovereign grace has done through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to clear the bad records and to change the bad hearts of a multitude of sinners.

Consider what Jesus said at the last supper with his disciples just before he was about to die. He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20). Jesus summed up the purpose of his mission in these three words, "the new covenant." All that the Lord Jesus did in emptying himself of his glory and coming to earth as a true man, all that he did in his sinless life, all that he was about to do by his death as a sin-bearing substitute for his people and by his glorious resurrection, led to and culminated in his establishing the new covenant.

But what did God promise in the new covenant? The Scripture records the substance of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws on their heart, and upon their mind also will I write them; and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

The new covenant primarily consists in the conferral of two blessings. (1) God promises that he will remember the sins and iniquities of his people no more. In other words, God says he will blot out their bad records forever; he will not hold their sins against them anymore. In the court of heaven his people are cleared of their guilt. (2) God promises to put his laws upon his people's hearts and to write his laws upon their minds. In the new covenant God changes the hearts of his people in such a way that his laws, once rejected and hated, are laid upon the hearts of his people so that they desire and delight to obey them. What God delights in, they now delight in. What grieves God, now brings them grief also. Furthermore, God's law is not only written on their hearts in such a way that they desire to keep it, but God enables them by his power to keep it more and more during this earthly life, and perfectly upon their entrance into heaven.

Thus, in the new covenant God as the Judge and Justifier of his people blots out their bad record. As Physician of the soul he changes and cures their sin-sick hearts. This is the good news: by God's grace full provision has been made for the clearing of the records and the changing of the hearts of any and all who come unto God through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the only solution to your greatest problem.

#### Solving the Problem

Now, what does all this mean for you? Note first that it does not mean that you should resolve to change your life so that your record will not get worse. No! That is not the gospel message. Even if you could straighten out your life and never get another blot on your record in heaven, like a mountain towering over you, your bad record would still cast its ominous shadow over you because of your past years of sin. Not adding more sin to the mountain of sin which you have already piled up would not keep you from sinking into hell. "Straighten up and live right" is not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, the gospel message is not, "Decide you are going to live for Jesus and begin to follow him." With a bad heart you will never want to or be able to. That is the problem. Your bad heart is set on pleasing yourself and not Jesus. You cannot follow Jesus like you are. You must be converted. You must be changed within. You must have a new heart!

Furthermore, the message of the gospel is not, "Just believe some facts about Jesus (that Jesus died on the cross for sinners, etc.) and then say a prayer and believe that all is well." No! That is not the summons of the gospel either.

The gospel message is, "Come to Jesus." He is the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 12:2-4). It is in coming to him that the blessings of the new covenant are received. Call upon Christ to save you. Acknowledge that you have rebelled against him, that you have broken God's law countless times, and that you are as bad as

the Scripture says you are, a hell-deserving sinner. Cast yourself upon Jesus Christ and his mercy. Plead the benefits of the new covenant promised to all that call upon him in truth. Ask him to clear your record and change your heart.

Christ said, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). If you are laboring under the load of your bad record and laden with the hopelessness of your bad heart, go to Christ to solve your problem and give you rest. Christ alone can apply the benefits of the new covenant. He is its mediator. The gospel message is not, "Come to an altar." It is not, "Come to an inquiry room." It is not, "Come to a minister." These are physical acts. The gospel message is, "Come to Christ alone through faith." This is a spiritual act. Call upon Christ to forgive your sins and grant you a new heart.

It is important to remember that when God saves a sinner, God confers both of the primary blessings of the new covenant. *Beware of thinking that your record has been blotted out, if you do not delight in God's law and endeavor to keep it.* This cannot be! God never confers one blessing without the other. He never blots out a sinner's bad record without also changing the sinner's heart. It is a soul-damning heresy to believe that you are saved from a bad record and are going to heaven, while you continue to live with an unchanged heart and in disobedience to and disregard for God's will in your life. If God has not given you a hatred for sin (all sin, not just some sins) and a determination to forsake all your sin, you are deceived and still have a bad heart. Call upon the Lord to forgive your foolish presumption and to change your heart.

Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, is the only solution to your greatest problem. Has God dealt with this problem in your life? Has God assured you that your sins are blotted out and that your bad record has been cleared by the substitutionary atoning sacrifice of Christ? Does your life demonstrate that God has given you a new heart? If not, seek Christ today. Cry unto Jesus the mediator of the new covenant. Plead for his mercy. No one ever perished for lack of mercy at the feet of Jesus. There is mercy there as broad as your sin, but remember it is only at his feet and nowhere else.

This booklet is based upon a sermon by the same title which was preached by Albert N. Martin, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church of Montville, New Jersey. A recording of the sermon is available on cassette tape from The Trinity Pulpit (P. O. Box 569, Montville, New Jersey 07045).

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