

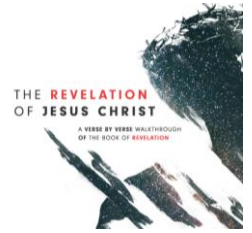
Title: Revelation, Part 24: What to Make of Sin

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 17

Big Idea: When we understand the 3-C's of sin, we can resist it better.

Memory verse of the month: Rev 15:4 Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you for your righteous acts have been revealed.



There are some topics that people like to hear talked about in church in a message, in a sermon, like, healthy relationships, how to resolve conflict, how to deal with difficult emotions. Those are all important topics to talk about. But there are also those topics that aren't the most popular like hell or tithing or sin.

Well today, we're going to look at one of those unpopular topics, sin. Sin has great bearing on our continued study of Revelation because the final judgments that Revelation shows us is due to sin.

So, here's the plan for today.

First, understand what sin is from a Bible Project animation.

Second, we'll unpack today's passage, Revelation 17.

Third, we'll learn insights from the chapter.

Big idea: When we understand the 3-C's of sin, we can resist it better.

We live in a sinful world, but a believer doesn't want to yield to the temptation to sin. That's my focus in this message, how to **not** give in. We must understand first, what sin is.

Let's gain an overall understand of what this biblical concept of sin is in this animation from the bible project.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/khata-sin/>

That's probably the best overall description of sin I've ever been exposed to.

Let's look at Revelation 17.

This is another perplexing chapter: we have a mystery woman, a scarlet beast with seven heads and 7 horns, seven hills, seven kings and 10 kings, and in chapter 18 which is a continuation of chapter 17, Babylon. One caution is that we must not get too cutsie in trying to specifically tie all these images to exact historical things or people. These are not meant to be brain teasers, but visions that symbolically represent general events to come, and they do represent some historical events at the time.

He describes common characteristics of nations that oppose God: prosperity, luxury, boastfulness, power, violence (especially against God's people), oppression, injustice, and idolatry.

Rev. 17:1 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me,

Remember that angels are prominent in John's visions.

"Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute...

This great prostitute is symbolic for any civilization that resists God and Christianity, represented by Rome at the time.

² With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.”

As we approach the end, people of the world will become drunk with abundance, power, pride, violence, sexual immorality, and especially false worship. This intoxication with what the world offers numbs people to the coming judgment.

The human heart, apart from the Jesus’ influence, will naturally drift toward greater and greater sin. Culture, without the restraining influence of a belief in and respect of God and his law, will drift toward greater and greater sin and chaos. This is what the overall message of Revelation tells us. Humanity and the world’s systems will drift further and further away from God’s intention, and as a result, a final judgement will come.

³ Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert.

He didn’t physically go into a desert, but the vision took him there.

This is the third of four times John has been carried away in the spirit. One of the constantly recurring features of the Biblical storyline is that it was in deserts that the great prophets of God saw their visions. ¹ (Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist. Jesus Himself spent time in the desert. It was seen as a place of safety and security, away from the dangers and temptations of the city.

There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.

This pictures an enticement to sin (described here as abominable things and filth) that was amplified by the glittering gold, precious stones, pearls and expensive clothing that only the rich could afford. There is not an indictment against nice clothes and jewelry. Rather, those things enticed, caught the eye, which would lead to what was figuratively in the cup, sin and vileness.



The woman probably represented Rome itself and the beast she was on represented the Roman empire. Blasphemous names would represent all the false gods they worshipped which insulted the one true God. The names would also represent the idolatrous names of the emperors, who were called gods themselves.

⁵ This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY. BABYLON THE GREAT. THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

In John’s vision of this woman, she had this name on her forehead and in those days prostitutes would wear their names across their foreheads. And a name on a forehead would reveal the person’s character. Remember she represented Rome and even one of the pagan Roman philosophers called Rome a sewer. It was a pretty messed up place.

And mother probably means that this image pictures all nations and kingdoms who reject God

⁶ ...When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

Why astonished? It’s the idea of wonder. Even though it was evil, it was enticing with all the beautiful stones and gold and expensive clothing.

So, the angel explains this.

¹ Barclay, W. (2004). *Revelation of John* (Vol. 2, pp. 161–162). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

Those who have rejected Christ will be easily led astray by falsehood **and** believers as well will be tempted to be led astray. That's why he says in another verse that we must be wise.

This beast represents the world's system that satan uses against Christianity which will entice people to further drift from God.

Then the following verses talk about various numbers of kings, referring to historical emperors but also to the totality of nation-states that will reject God. Johns uses the number 7 and the number 10, not to tie specific rulers to these numbers, but to refer to the whole or all of the empires in history past and in history to come that will oppose Christianity.

John uses this phrase about these nation-states to remind us that they will not last.

...for a little while. ...for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.

¹³ They have one purpose ... ¹⁴...make war against the Lamb,

These rulers will be pawns in satan's hands to oppose Jesus and all he stands for.

Yet, he says this.

but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

Jesus and all his followers will ultimately triumph.

Then he makes this graphic statement.

¹⁶ The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

The beast hates this prostitute and ultimately destroys it. What does this imager mean? It pictures the true nature of evil. It turns on itself, like the beast turned on the prostitute

The Roman Empire and its allies would eventually turn on Rome itself. The very nature of evil is that it is self-destructive from within. It never builds up. It only tears down and destroys. It doesn't unite, it only divides.

Wicked men and women are not just one happy band of brothers nor sisters. Being wicked, they act in jealousy and hatred. At the climax their mutual hatreds will result in mutual destruction.²

Satan, by divine purpose, will be divided against himself. John writes of the self-destroying power of persistent evil in a culture and in our lives. It ultimately turns in on itself and on us.

Let's go back to our big idea. Big idea: When we understand the 3-C's of sin, we can resist it better.

The 3-C's of Sin

Sin cons.

Have you ever been conned by someone, telemarketer or some stranger? To be conned means that something or someone, in this case sin, entices, seduces, tricks, tantalizes, presents itself as good when in reality it is not good. It is fake goodness. Remember the prostitute image dressed in beautiful clothing, and precious gems, and a golden goblet?

² Morris, L. (1987). [*Revelation: an introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 20, p. 204). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Even John was taken aback and astonished. And for a moment he was a bit deceived and drawn to it until the angel mildly confronted him for his amazement and then the angel explained what this image was, evil.

Sin shimmers, looks delightful, attracts, gets our eye.

Think of it like this. What would you eat this or this?

But If I told you that this cupcake is this cupcake, with icing on top to conceal the mold. That's what the evil one does when he tempts us. He makes bad look good. He puts icing on the deadly mold of sin to make it look tasty, enticing, good, appealing.



That's why John said in 17.9 'This calls for a mind with wisdom'.

Sin cons.

Sin controls.

John wrote, **the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.**

Think about what people do who get drunk?

A caveat. I don't drink and never have. That's my personal conviction. The bible clearly says drinking to excess is wrong. The bible does not prohibit social drinking as long as it is done in moderation and in deference to those around you. So, I've chosen not to drink alcohol for several reasons, and everybody has to decide their own conviction.

With that caveat about my practice, I became friends in high school with a guy named Crawford Odum. He was real popular, student council president, marching band leader, and he took an interest in geeky me even though he was an upper classman.

One Friday night we were out driving around. He had a really cool car, and I didn't drive at the time. Well, we dropped by one of his friend's houses. His friend lived in a small trailer. We walked in and his friend was slumped over on a couch looking like he was asleep, and he was holding a cooking pan on his stomach. I thought that was really odd until I realized he was in a drunken stupor and had passed out and needed that pan if he threw up.

I thought, wow, is that really fun?

My uncle Lee was a huge drinker and one night he was out with some unsavory guys and he got drunk as he often did. The story goes someone pushed him off a porch. He severely hurt his back. They literally, as the story goes, loaded him into the bed of a pickup, drove to the hospital, and literally dropped him off there. From that fall, he became a paraplegic, confined to wheelchair. Yet, that horrible accident due to his misuse of alcohol ultimately led to his trusting Christ and he joined a little singing group at the nursing where he lived until he died.

So, when a person is drunk/intoxicated, they are controlled by alcohol and these things happen.

- Their thinking is muddled.
- Their inhibitions are compromised.
- They lose perspective.
- They get numbed.
- They have less regard for personal choices that could be costly.

John used this word picture of intoxication to describe how sin can control us, like too much alcohol can control a person. And nothing good comes from that.

Sin cons, sin controls and third...

Sin corrodes your heart and body

Remember this graphic verse.

¹⁶ The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

These evil world systems will turn in on themselves. It will be civil war. They will self-destruct.

Perpetual sin eventually turns in on the sinner and consumes your heart, your soul, your passions, your joy, and can even consume your body.

James 1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Sin leads to spiritual and emotional and relational and even physical death.

Sin not only corrodes our hearts, but has a ripple effect on others.

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled. Hebrews 4.15 ESV

The writer of Hebrews uses a metaphor of something growing, which takes time. Over time, if, say, sinful bitterness, or any sin, takes root in your heart and you don't deal with it he says that it produces bitter fruit which poisons those in close proximity to us, our friends and family. Nothing may be seen initially, but it will show up because that unattended sin is slowly and persistently growing in our heart.

A father, say, who is verbally mean to his children, although the effects may not be obvious early on in that child, can leave profound harmful effects upon that child's heart that show up when that child grows up and finds that he or she is, for example, a hyper-anxious people pleaser.

Our sin corrodes our hearts, and our sin can corrode the lives and hearts of others. Sin's devastating effects aren't limited to our private lives.



None of us want that in our lives.

So What do we do to resist these 3-C's of sin? Well, the key is in v 14.

¹⁴ They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

To use the cliché, which is true, Jesus is the answer. He says we can overcome through him as we are faithful because he has overcome.

Jesus gives us what we need to deal with sin and the temptation to sin. But it's not as simple as, just say no, or glibly *just trust Jesus*. Yes, trusting Jesus is the place to start, the foundation, the core, our true north, our power to deal with sin. But let's be honest, if you are a Christian, you still struggle with some temptation. Being a Christian does not remove us from all temptation.

Here's what we can do to rise above and resist these deadly sins.

Think of it this way.

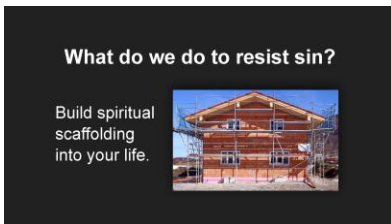


What is this stuff around this house? It's scaffolding.

What does scaffolding do for a bricklayer? It enables him to move higher and higher to lay the bricks and build the walls. That scaffolding doesn't do the brick laying. The mason does it. But it lifts him up so he can lay the bricks.

Spiritual scaffolding is like that. It's something that helps us move forward, move up in consistency in following Jesus.

So, following Jesus, which requires resisting sin, requires spiritual scaffolding to help us resist that sin.



Build spiritual scaffolding into your life. That begs the question.

What is spiritual scaffolding?

1. The church, the body of Christ = being with other believers.
2. Spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual disciplines are day-to-day choices (practices) help build our internal reserve, strength, and wisdom to prepare us to respond in "growing" ways to circumstances and people and grow in Christ. Spiritual disciplines are habits and spiritual activities that create opportunities for God to work. They are not ends in themselves but means to an end. They include prayer, bible reading, giving, serving, and even silence and solitude.

*Think about a farmer. He is helpless to grow his crops. He can only provide the right conditions-tills the ground, throws the seed out, puts fertilizer out, waters his crops. He does not make the crops grow; he does things to create a growing environment.

The same is true of spiritual practices or disciplines. They are God's way of getting us into the ground; they put us where he can work within us and transform us. By themselves the disciplines or practices can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where Jesus can truly do something in our hearts, like resisting sin.

So, from memory, let's see if you can recall these key concepts.

The 3-c's

Sin cons.

Sin controls.

Sin corrodes.

What do we do to resist sin?



Build spiritual scaffolding into your life.

- Two kinds of spiritual scaffolding
- The Church
- Spiritual disciplines

Here's an assignment, what scaffolding can you add to or strengthen in your life this week?