

Trinity Lutheran Church
Morris Plains, NJ
Bible Study

Free in Christ... Free to Serve!!!

SESSION 1 UNIVERSAL BONDAGE OF SIN THE BURDEN WE CARRY

In Charles Dickens's classic *A Christmas Carol*, Jacob Marley dies but returns from the grave to confront Ebenezer Scrooge. Wrapped around Marley is a thick, heavy chain. It rattles as he walks toward Scrooge's chair. Standing directly before Scrooge, Marley takes hold of the chain and shakes it in the face of his old partner.

"You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why."

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?"

Scrooge trembled more and more.

"Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!"

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he could see nothing.

"Jacob," he said, imploringly. "Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!" "I have none to give," the Ghost replied. Both Marley and Ebenezer Scrooge had fashioned their own bondage during life.

Link by link, their sins formed together into a long chain of offenses witnessed before heaven.

Read Romans 3:23 and discover whether or not you, too, wear a chain woven in links of sin.

Marley and Scrooge wore heavy chains fashioned from their sins. They are fictional characters, but we live in the real world. Apart from Christ, all of us wear our sin before God.

Read Psalm 51:5 and Romans 5:12.

How far back do the links of your sin go?

Where and how was the first link of your bondage formed?

IT ALL STARTED WITH UNBELIEF The first link of sin was forged in the Garden of Eden. This first and great step into sin was taken through unbelief and not through an obvious and overt act of disobedience. Eve disobeyed God, this is true. Sin, however, started before the forbidden fruit actually touched her lips. Sin began in her heart. Eve sinned when she did not trust God. She listened instead to the serpent. Sin is unbelief, and faith is trust.

Martin Luther in his work “Treatise on Christian Liberty” speaks of faith as the highest worship of God: “The very highest worship of God is this that we ascribe to him truthfulness, righteousness, and whatever else should be ascribed to one who is trusted” (Luther’s Works, vol. 31, p. 350).

Faith glorifies God, but unbelief shows us to be rebels. Unbelief moved Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Unbelief distrusts God’s Word and promise. Luther says of unbelief, “What greater rebellion against God, what greater wickedness, what greater contempt of God is there than not believing his promise?” Unbelief is the fuel which energizes disobedience (p. 350).

Take a minute to examine situations within **your personal life**. Quietly explore those times when unbelief fueled your disobedience. For example, some Christians do not worship weekly within a church because they do not believe that God will bless those who draw near to Him.

HEREDITARY SIN:

Past history and present history show God’s people as they struggled against unbelief. The Bible records many instances where faith faltered. One book in the Bible, Numbers, tells of several occasions when Israel distrusted God. We will take a look at one example. This moment in history illustrated the doctrines of original sin and justification by grace through faith.

Sometimes we describe original sin as hereditary sin. In other words, each person inherits sin from Adam and Eve. This sin clings to us. It marks us as unrighteous. It chains us to the power of Satan. Original sin sentences us.

1. Read Genesis 2:16–17 and 3:17–19. What sentence was placed upon humanity because of sin?

2. Read Numbers 21:4–9 together.

a. The Israelites left their bondage to the Egyptians but walked right into another bondage, a bondage brought on by their distrust of God. List their complaints against God (v. 5). Why was this distrust so offensive to God?

b. Share ways that God’s people today may be guilty of the same distrust. What can our distrust do to our relationship with God?

3. When an Israelite was bitten by a serpent, that individual was sentenced to death. The Israelite infected with the serpent’s venom still lived for a while but eventually died. In the Garden of Eden, each son and daughter of Adam and Eve, within every generation, was infected by the serpent’s venomous lie. Every person lives for a season, but eventually dies.

a. How does the account of the Israelites who had been bitten by a serpent represent our situation?

b. Read Romans 5:12. What does the spread of sin to all people mean for you personally? Discuss how your own death is tied with the fall of Eden.

4. The Israelites were sentenced to die under the serpent’s sting. Clearly, they had no power to escape within their own means. The people were forced to look to God for their deliverance

from death. Read Psalm 32:3–7. What three elements within the psalm parallel the heart of the people in Numbers 21:4–9?

DELIVERANCE—THE POWER IN GOD’S WORD

The Lord provided deliverance for His children. God commanded Moses to make the figure of a snake and place it upon a pole. Any Israelite who had been bitten and looked to the snake would be saved.

1. Read Isaiah 44:9–18. Could this snake be considered an idol? Why or why not?

2. Since the snake cast by Moses could not be an idol, it must have represented something else to the people. It represented the promise of God. Like the water of Baptism and the elements within the Lord’s Supper, the serpent of bronze had no power in itself. The bronze serpent was connected to God’s Word and promise. Those who followed God’s Word, when bitten, would live. The power for healing and life came from God, not from the figure of the serpent. Consider different responses that likely took place among the people of Israel when confronted by God’s Word and promise.

- a. What happened to all those who refused to look to the serpent out of pride, doubt, or arrogance?
- b. Discuss parallels between the serpent on the pole and Christ on the cross.
- c. What does your faith in Christ do to the serpent’s lie that sentenced you to death?

3. We see in the ruin of Eden that each person has fallen under the shadow of sin, death, and the devil. These enemies of life and faith have infected every level of human thinking and enterprise. Read the Scripture passages given and then mark the following statements as true (T) or false (F).

1. 1 Corinthians 1:21. Human wisdom alone has remained untouched by the corruption of sin.
2. Deuteronomy 27:26. One need not keep the Law to be right with God, but rather simply show a sincere heart.
3. 1 John 5:19. God has given the whole world over to the power of the devil.
4. Romans 3:23. Absolutely no one except for Christ has attained the glory of God under the Law.
5. Romans 7:7. The Law itself has become evil.
6. Romans 7:22–23. St. Paul was made captive to the law of sin.
7. Colossians 3:5–7. God’s wrath is no longer revealed against human sin.

ALL OF US ARE CAPTIVE TO SIN

1. Paul speaks of original sin in his letter to the Church at Rome. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to help us understand our bondage to sin. Adam's sin has brought condemnation upon all people. Escape from the sentence of death does not lie within human hands. Read Romans 5:18. How does God save us from our bondage to sin and death?

2. Adam's sin brought us under God's wrath. Christ's righteousness has abundantly given us grace and life. Take a few minutes to complete the following paragraph: Adam's sin infected (some/all) future generations. Sin brought God's sentence of _____.

Sin also turned the world over from God's perfect will and placed it into the hands of _____.

No child of earth has power against this evil authority. Only _____ has the power to save us.

He did so by sending the "Second Adam" named _____. The Second Adam worked salvation for all, but only those who look to Christ and (believe/keep the Law) will be saved.

WHEN GOD WORKS, WE ARE CHANGED

The Israelite, bitten and sure to die, must have had some strong emotions and new thoughts after looking to the bronze serpent. The poison disappeared. Strength again filled the believer's limbs. The future was reopened.

1. What do you suppose was the general response of the people to God after He had delivered them? Did they grow or diminish in love toward Him? Were they given more or less reason to continue along the way of God's leading through the wilderness? Give specific ways in which God's grace empowers you to receive forgiveness and live abundantly on the job and with family and friends.

2. God's grace delivers every Christian. It comes to the believer through faith in the work of Christ. This grace comes to us day by day as we live as baptized children of God whose sinful nature has been crucified and buried with Christ in Baptism. Discuss new insights that you have gained concerning God's work to deliver you. Do you see Christ as Judge or Savior? How can God's work empower your life of devotion and love?

3. Think of a time when your actions grew out of your bondage to sin instead of the freedom you have through Christ. . If you feel comfortable doing so, share this with the group. How can God's forgiveness free you from that bondage? God uses His Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper as means to bring freedom to you personally. When have you lived in that freedom instead of the bondage you mentioned? If you wish, share this, too, with the group.

WRAPPING IT UP We can close by speaking the words of "All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall" (LSB 562) as our joint prayer. (you don't want me singing!!!)

All mankind fell in Adam's fall;
One common sin infects us all.

From one to all the curse descends,
And over all God's wrath impends.

Through all our pow'rs corruption creeps
And us in dreadful bondage keeps;
In guilt we draw our infant breath
And reap its fruits of woe and death.

From hearts depraved, to evil prone,
Flow thoughts and deeds of sin alone;
God's image lost, the darkened soul
Seeks not nor finds its heav'nly goal.

But Christ, the second Adam, came
To bear our sin and woe and shame,
To be our life, our light, our way,
Our only hope, our only stay.

As by one man all mankind fell
And, born in sin, was doomed to hell,
So by one Man, who took our place,
We all were justified by grace.

We thank You, Christ; new life is ours,
New light, new hope, new strength, new pow'rs. T
his grace our ev'ry way attend
Until we reach our journey's end.

AMEN!!!