

High Definition – examining how the definition of our words make a world of a difference.

Christian Wiman:

*"Does the decay of belief among educated people in the West precede the decay of language used to define and explore belief, or do we sense the fire of belief fading in us only because the words are sodden with overuse and imprecision and will not burn?"*

David Brooks – *"Many adults hunger for meaning and goodness, but lack a spiritual vocabulary to think things through."*

So we've been taking a hard look at our vocabulary, from words we use over and over and over again in our Church communities without ever pausing to define, to words we've all but stopped using.

We've stopped referencing lament, and it's changed the way we consider prayer.

We've stopped retired the word liturgy, and it's changed the way we consider worship.

Tonight : SIN.

The earliest Jewish portrayals of sin spoke of it as a **STAIN**.

It's why we see **Isaiah 1:18** say: *"You are stained red with sin, but I will wash you as clean as snow. Although your stains are deep red, you will be as white as wool."*

This metaphor carries through to the end of the Bible, where we see in **Revelation 7:14**:

*"They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."*

This metaphor still lives in our worship, as we sing:

*"What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus."*

Sin as a **WEIGHT**.

We see this in Old Testament sacrifices when the weight of sin was placed on a scapegoat.

We see this metaphor in the worship we sing too **"O Come to the Altar"** talks about being *"overwhelmed by the weight of your sin."*

Due to the influence and growth of trade and commerce, sin as a **DEBT** replaced and ran laps around other metaphors for sin by the time Jesus was teaching.

The Our Father– *"forgive us our sins"* is synonymous in translation with *"forgive us our debts."*

Parables tell stories of debtors and the forgiving of debts.

And Paul carries this imagery into his epistles as he speaks of the wages of sin.

Repercussions – venial and mortal sins flowed from this, and indulgences that could be purchased to balance our sin "account"

Many of us think about it like a speeding ticket. I make sure it's paid, but there are worse things I could have done, nobody really got hurt, and there are worse criminals than me. It's just an infraction to be paid off that doesn't bother us much.

To lean into one definition or metaphor for sin is problematic.

But I want look at sin tonight by looking at some words that we've all but retired.

## **Saint.**

The Protestant Church has largely distanced itself from the word. Yet it's all over our Bibles. The New Testament uses the word "**saint**" some **59 times**. It's definition means "set apart" "holy" "to sanctify"

In Catholic theology – saints are in Heaven. After death they are canonized as such. But in scripture –

**1.) Saints are on earth.**

**2.) Saints are plural.** Saint is almost universally used in the plural.

There is only one instance of the word saint in the singular:

**Philippians 4:21** – "*greet every saint in Christ Jesus.*"

That verse speaks to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And we see that Biblically speaking, saints are the Church, the Body of Christ.

A "**Saint**" is who we are in Christ.

## **1 Corinthians 1:2**

*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul opens his letter calling the grimmest church we see in the New Testament – filled with abuse of God's gifts, divisions, and outright adultery – by calling them saints. Saints in training.

Clearly he doesn't say this based on their merit. How could he say this? We see how in verse 8: *[God] will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful.*

**Rich Mullins** - I'd throw a halo on his head if I drew him and imitate old paintings of saints. Rummage through the lineup of Catholic saints and you find misfits and outcasts, seemingly miscast in their time and culture. Rich Mullins fits the bill.

*He said he was being interviewed by a representative from an evangelical program that wanted to have him as a guest but felt like they needed to check him out beforehand because of rumors they'd heard. They asked him how old he was when he became a Christian, and he said, "I guess about 2 or 3." "So young?" they responded, "What happened?" Rich said that in Sunday School they sang a song, "Come into my heart, Come into my heart. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus..." The woman said, "Well, that's not what I meant. You couldn't have possibly been old enough to understand what you were praying." And then Rich responds, "Lady...we never understand what we're praying. And God in His mercy does not answer our prayers according to our understanding, but according to His wisdom."*

*Rich goes on to talk about how he was baptized at the age of 10 because after saying a bad word in front of his mom he knew he'd sinned and needed to get right with God. The lady pressed further and said, "No, but what we really want to know is when were you born again." Rich said, "Lady, which time?" He goes on to explain that he used to get born again about once a year, then at college it turned into more of a quarterly thing. Finally, by the time he hit his forties, he was getting born again about 4-5 times a day.*

I don't think Rich Mullins point was that we should doubt our salvation or we shouldn't walk in assurance of God's love. I think his point is that we should remember that sin remains in us until we step into Heaven's gates, and that should keep us running repeatedly to God's grace.

But again – sometimes we act like sin isn't that serious.

It's a parking ticket on an otherwise clean record. We have no problem admitting we've committed sins, we just don't like thinking of ourselves as sinners. We don't like to own our sin (*"I struggle with lying, but I'm not a liar. I struggle with gossip, but I'm not a gossip"*)

I'm a bigger sinner than I thought. Jesus is a bigger savior than I thought.

"God who is rich in mercy" is richer than I could imagine.

**Screwtape Letters** – the most effective way of discrediting a virtue is to first of all ruin the word. Introduce associations that alter feelings and even definitions. And do this until the word no longer works as intended.

Sin is the opposite of virtue. But the same tactics apply.

Sin has become associated with condemnation. As a result we avoid conversations about sin.

In 1 John 1:8-10 what does John tie the presence of sin to?

**Confession.**

*"he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

Confessionals aren't found in our churches - as a result the need to confess has often been left forgotten in Protestant circles, and the application can get weird.

We know the Bible talks about confession. So we embrace the virtue of vulnerability. Being authentic. Raw. "Confession" is often something we start social media posts with when we're exposing some piece of ourselves.

But it's really a veneer of vulnerability.

We get to curate and craft this image on social media.

And in time this is the reality and realization we come to again and again:

*You can posture as authentic online we be 100% inauthentic with those we're closest to.*

Confession as a word that comes from the roots meaning "together" and "to admit."

Confession is coming together with God and/or a brother or sister in Christ and confessing our failings.

The Bible doesn't give us a confession manual.

It gives us principles, but not a full primer.

But it does show us that spiritual development and confession go hand in hand.

Confession is powerful, because confession reminds us that while we develop and grow - we still sin. We fight sin. But we don't go undefeated. We still need grace.

And it reminds us that we serve a gracious faithful God that is faithful to forgive.

David gives us a beautiful poetic picture of all of this deep theological discussion in **Ps 32:1-5**  
*Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.  
Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night your hand was heavy on me;  
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer  
Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord."  
And you forgave the guilt of my sin.  
Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found...*

Do you confess your sins and find forgiveness regularly?  
To keep away from confession is to sap your strength.  
David says to do so is to be blessed.  
Jesus says the same.

In **Matthew 5:4**, at the beginning of his sermon on the mount, he says:  
**"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."**

We make this about death... but it's not about death.  
This speaks to those who mourn their sin.

If you look at the AMP version it spells out the implications of the original text:  
***"blessed are those who mourn [over their sins and repent]"***

The comfort? The same comfort that David felt: the weight of sin is lifted.  
Because the weight is lifted. The stain is removed. The debt is paid.  
That's the Gospel. The beauty of the Good News.  
The problem is that we all want comfort but we skip the first part of the equation. The bad news.

Nobody would say **"I go to church to mourn."** (Let's be honest, that sounds weird)  
We come to be comforted. But there's no good news without the bad news. The bad news comes first. And this is good news. You know why? I've never had a perfect week. Every week I come to church there's brokenness to lay before God. Because I'm still at war with sin. And while I celebrate wins. I also confess losses.

I come to lay down my sin and brokenness at the foot of the cross.  
And I walk out of Church reminded that I'm a saint.

It's the beautiful reality of **Hebrews 10:14** that I'm known to point to repeatedly:  
***For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.***  
He has made holy those still being made holy.  
He has made perfect those still being made perfect.  
He has made saints those still wrestling with sin.

Why this sermon? What now?

First, we need to divorce sin from condemnation.  
Because sin married to condemnation becomes a weapon of the enemy.  
He uses it to keep us from coming to Christ out of shame.  
*“God doesn’t want anything to do with me.”*

But do you know what blows my mind every time I read it?  
Jesus Christ was known as the son of David.

We think, **“yeah sure, David was a man after God’s own heart.”**

But pause. Timeout.

We villainize King Saul and lionize King David. David’s sin resume was worse than Saul’s. His list checked more boxes.

Saul’s biggest issue wasn’t the size of his sins - it was pride. It doesn’t matter how much you mess up, what matters is whether you confess and then take it to God. David did just that.  
And Jesus was called “The Son of David” – showing he has no qualms being related to a sinner.

The Devil is the master of exception.

One good thing makes you OK. One bad thing disqualifies.

God cares about your character. The posture of your heart as you still wage war with sin.

David is called in scripture a man after God’s own heart.

It says he fulfilled the purposes of God for his generation.

He even shamelessly points to his own righteousness in the book of Psalms.

He understood God sees us not based on exceptions but by our character.

Our flesh and the spirit are in conflict, and while we wage war, we won’t go undefeated.

God cares about our character.

Living in the balance of Hebrews 10:14 - a justified saint, a sinner being sanctified - helps us practically in a couple ways:

**It is the foundation for a healthy self-image.**

Those who let sin and condemnation take a hold on their life will be humble but lack boldness.

Those who identify as a saint but forget their need for grace due to sin become arrogant. Plenty bold. Hardly humble.

Having an identity and self-image that’s big enough for both makes you humble but not spineless, bold but not arrogant.

**It is the foundation for healthy interactions.**

Those who let sin and condemnation take the wheel never step into healthy confrontation.

Those who identify as saint and forget their need for grace become aggressive and attacking because they lose their self-awareness.