

Midweek 3
Psalm 51:5
Revealing Our Sinful Nature

- I. Sin has thoroughly corrupted our nature.
- II. Jesus frees us from ourselves.

“I can’t help it!” People say those words in a variety of circumstances. If an employee is sick and unable to make it to work and the boss asks why she has called in three days in a row, she may say, “I’m sick. I can’t help it!” If the weather keeps a house painter from completing a project within the promised time frame, he may say, “I can’t help it! I can’t control the weather!”

We mutter “I can’t help it!” when circumstances beyond our control compel us to act in a way that’s negative or unproductive. We use “I can’t help it!” as an excuse for behaviors, thoughts, and feelings that are clearly sinful.

“I can’t help it!” Is that an accurate explanation of sin? Is it a valid excuse for sin?

The last two weeks we’ve reviewed what sin is and how it impacts our relationship with God. In our walk through Psalm 51, we’ve seen how sin reveals our desperate need for repentance and for our Savior Jesus. We’ve reflected on the truth that each sin we commit—whether in thought, word, or deed—is an act of rebellion against God himself. Today, we get to the root of every sin we commit as we look at a key passage that teaches the doctrine of original sin: that we are by our very nature sinful. The insight, the reminder, the reality we face today is that our Lord God **reveals our sinful nature**—sin has thoroughly corrupted our nature. But Jesus frees us from ourselves.

- I. Sin has thoroughly corrupted our nature.

The verse before us is “*Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me.*” By this verse, the Lord bursts any self-righteous bubble in which we may live. This verse teaches that our nature is thoroughly corrupted by sin: We are sinful by our very nature and therefore cannot avoid sin entirely. It has been this way since the first people fell into sin. In Genesis chapter 1, we’re told that God created Adam and Eve in his image. They were like God, without sin. As a result, they were in perfect harmony with God and in perfect relationship with each other, so much so that at the end of Genesis chapter 2, we’re told that they were naked but not ashamed (Genesis 2:25).

God gave Adam and Eve one specific command by which they could demonstrate their love for him: They were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet Satan tempted Eve, and she ate. Then Adam, who was with her, ate from the tree as well. Adam and Eve lost the image of God, with the result that they were ashamed of their nakedness and hid from God (Genesis 3:10-11). Their nature was totally changed so that when God

confronted them with their sin, their default was to try to cover it up with lies (Genesis 3:13-14). Because they sinned against God, they would know pain, hardship, and death (Genesis 3:16-19).

Adam and Eve's children inherited a sinful nature from them. In Genesis chapter 5, we hear a striking difference between Adam and Eve at the time of creation and their son Seth. Adam and Eve were created "*in the likeness of God*" (Genesis 5:1). In Genesis 5:3, we're told that "*Adam lived 130 years, and he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his own image, and he named him Seth*" (emphasis added). Adam and Eve had been created in the image of God, but Seth was born in the image of his sinful parents. He inherited from them a sinful nature that made him guilty before God and also led him to sin against God.

Down through the generations, all people have inherited sin from their sinful parents. King David, who wrote the psalm before us, was born sinful. We've talked about the sins David committed in his heart and mind. Sins of the heart and mind are inevitable because of the sinful nature with which we were born. Sinful thoughts and sinful feelings, for which we deserve God's punishment, flow naturally from our sinfulness.

The sins of David that we've discussed are sins of the heart. He was guilty of a sin of omission: of not doing what he should have when he stayed home instead of carrying out his kingly duty of leading his army into battle. He lusted after Bathsheba in his heart when he saw her bathing on her roof. He plotted in his heart to cover up his sin with lies and schemes. None of those sinful thoughts are particularly surprising in light of the sinful nature with which he was born. His sinfulness led to many other sins, including turning from the Lord and relying on himself.

So often we see evidence of the sinful nature we inherited from our parents. In fact, every sin we commit with our hands starts as a sin of the mind and heart, showing that our very nature is corrupt and sinful. As the psalmist points out, we are guilty at birth, sinful from conception. Think of the toddler's temper tantrum in the middle of the store, the ten-year-old's disobedience of his parents' rules, or the teenager's belief that she knows more than the people God has placed over her. All of those sins begin in the heart. Sadly, it doesn't change as we grow older. We regularly have covetous, lustful, hateful, worrying, and mistrusting thoughts and feelings that painfully demonstrate to us the sinful nature we inherited.

The corruption of our nature is so deep, sin naturally flows from us. Because we are sinful by nature, we will sin and not just in our thoughts. That, however, does not excuse our sins. That will not compel God to say, "I will not hold you accountable for the sins you commit." Instead, God says that every sinner falls short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) and that the punishment we deserve is eternal judgment because "*the wages of sin is death*"

(Romans 6:23). Nothing we do can take away our sin and nothing we do can change what we deserve for it. The sinful nature wants us to react to this revelation in one of two destructive ways: either flippantly, so that we stop caring how much we sin, since we can't help it, or despairingly, since we can't do anything to save ourselves.

In his mercy, God **reveals our sinful nature** to us. We were born with it. In fact, we were conceived with it. We cannot help but sin because sin has so thoroughly corrupted our nature. Because we are guilty at birth, we deserve only God's wrath and punishment in hell. God reveals this hard truth to us as an act of mercy: to prepare our hearts to hear of his awesome love for sinners in Jesus.

II. Jesus frees us from ourselves.

God shows mercy to us sinners by **revealing our sinful nature**. "We can't help it!" is not an excuse for sin or a license to sin as much as we want. "We can't help it!" shows us how desperately we need a Savior. Jesus is that Savior.

He is the one promised from the beginning to free us from our sin. Immediately after confronting Adam and Eve with their sin, God promised a Savior to undo the devil's wicked work (Genesis 3:15). God spoke that promise again and again throughout the Old Testament to people who repeatedly rebelled against him. Their unfaithfulness demonstrated the horrible power of the sinful nature. On the other hand, the Lord's renewal of his promise and his repeated calls to repentance powerfully demonstrated his great love and mercy.

In that mercy, the Son of God entered the world to be the Savior of the world. "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus did not have a sinful nature. He lived perfectly under the law so he could offer himself as the sacrifice for sin. Jesus is the perfect Savior whose death cancels the guilt of the sin with which we're born. He took our place, accepted our guilt, and endured our punishment so that even our inherited original sin is forgiven. Jesus saves us from ourselves.

During the season of Lent, we see Jesus complete his work as our Savior from sin. We see him succeeding in all the ways we so often fail because of our sinful nature. Think of examples from the Passion History, of times when Jesus' thoughts could have been sinful but instead were pure and holy. He showed himself to be the perfect humble servant as he washed his disciples' feet the night before he died for their sins. He showed forgiving love to the one who betrayed him as he called Judas to repentance. When he was arrested, he went willingly and selflessly and made sure his disciples went free. He mercifully prayed for forgiveness for those who nailed him to the cross. All are times when each of us must admit that our thoughts would not have been pure and holy, that our sinful nature would

most likely have won out. For all those times, Jesus remained sinless to save us from the punishment we deserved.

The words of this psalm are true: *“Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me”* (Psalm 51:5). For this reason, we need the forgiveness of sins from the very beginning. Thanks be to God who sent Jesus to remove our guilt, even the guilt we were born with and the sins that flow naturally from our sinful nature—the thoughts we can’t control and the feelings we can’t stop. In his mercy, Jesus paid for it all and made us his own. He calls us to repentance, and in response, we worship and praise him. We thank him always that in his Word, God has **revealed our sinful nature**. And in spite of that nature, he suffered in our place so that by faith in him we do not receive what we deserve. Instead, we get heaven. For that we rejoice. God’s saving love for us so fills our hearts with joy that we can’t help it! Amen.