

Cowardly or Courageous Proverbs 28:1

Sharing is defined by Webster's as a part or portion that belongs or is allotted to an individual, or the part contributed by one.

David likes me to share my marshmallow peeps with him. We like to share time together at Sam's Club over a pretzel and a frozen coke. We want David to learn to share with others. At seven it's still hard sometimes to share a toy that he has been playing with that some other child grabs from him. I tell him the next time that happens just hit the kid. You know I wouldn't tell him that. I want him to learn to share.

Growing up my Mom always told us it was nice to share. Maybe you were taught that too. Today we might share a ride with someone to work to save on gas. If you were in college you may have shared a dorm room. You may share a locker with someone else at school. If you go out to eat, you might share a pizza.

There are some things we would just as soon you not share. You can keep you cold or the flu and pink eye.

If we really thought about it, we probably share more than we realize.

There is something else we all share, whether we like it or not or whether we want to or not. We share a sin nature. There is a word we will look at today. It's a word you need to know. Doctrinally it is a very important word and one that is foundational to our faith. That word is impute.

But first, before we get ahead of ourselves turn in your Bibles this morning to **Proverbs 28:1**.

"The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion."

Here are two contrasting individuals or groups of people. You have the wicked on one hand and you have the righteous on the other. They are spoken about time and time again throughout Scripture. God reveals to Abraham that He is about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. Abraham intercedes on behalf of the righteous that live there. Would God destroy it if there could be found even ten righteous in the land?

The Lord spoke about the wicked who inhabited the land of Canaan that Israel was to remove by possessing it for themselves.

On several occasions Jesus taught about these two groups and that someday they will be separated. God will judge the two condemning the wicked to eternal separation from Him while the righteous will remain in His presence forever.

John's Revelation is a glimpse into the future of what is yet to come when the words of Jesus come to pass and the wicked are separated from the righteous.

Here are these two groups of people. Now let's clear something up about the verse that is before us. We don't want there to be any misunderstanding from the text. The verse is not implying in any way that there are no bold wicked people; that they are always cowering in fear on the run for their sins. And neither is it saying that all the righteous are as bold as a lion.

Scripture alone shows us that there are many wicked people who flaunted their wickedness. They were blatant about it. Queen Jezebel comes to mind as does Haman and we shouldn't forget Pharaoh. Recent history also gives us plenty of evidence of wicked people who were bold about their sin. We can look at the likes of Hitler or Stalin, Saddam Hussein and Idi Amin or Charles Manson and Jeffry Dahmer. We don't have to look

very far to see that the wicked abound and that they are bold.

Proverbs 14:16 says in one translation that the “fool rages and is bold.” The NIV says he is “careless.” A person who doesn’t even believe in God can act in a reckless and bold way. They flaunt their sin and even thumb their nose at God daring Him to punish them for their wrongdoing.

Now the Bible is very clear that everyone is born in this state of wickedness. It’s in our DNA.

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

“All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way...” Isaiah 53:6

What does the Bible say about the characteristics of the wicked?

Romans 1:18-32

Romans 3:10-18

Galatians 5:19-21

Ephesians 2:1-3

Colossians 3:5-10

Reading that laundry list and comparing it to the acts of man from what we read and see we should never for a moment get the idea that for the most part mankind is inherently good and decent. No one is. We are all guilty of being wicked because it only takes one sin to be guilty of God’s law.

Just as it is in the nature of geese to fly south for the winter or for salmon to swim upstream to spawn or for dogs to bark or rattlesnakes to rattle, so it is in the nature of man to be wicked, no matter how good he thinks he is. There is no one who does right on his own effort.

Let’s agree that the term wicked means evil. It is an individual or act that is morally wrong or depraved.

How did we get that evil nature? Here is where I want to try to define that word I used earlier. It’s that word IMPUTE. Say that word.

Here is the dictionary definition: “to attribute, especially a fault or misconduct to another; to charge with.”

A theological definition is to reckon over to one’s account. As I said earlier, this is a major doctrine of Christianity. Paul used the word when he told Philemon to put to his (Paul’s) account anything that Onesimus, a slave, owed him. What he was saying is that he would take on the debt himself.

There is both a negative and positive side to imputation. First let’s look at the negative side.

When the first man was created, he was created in the image of God. Like God, He had no sin. But unlike God who cannot sin, man was initially given the will to sin or not to sin. That is no longer the case. We are all born in sin and we all sin.

Romans 5:12 is very clear to tell us that **“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”** (emphasis added)

Now understand that sin did not originate with man. Sin originated within the angelic host when Lucifer who was created the most beautiful of all angels, became proud in heart and sinned against God. Instead of reflecting God’s glory he desired and determined to usurp God’s glory and kingdom. Because of his sin, he along with 1/3 of other angels who rebelled with him, were cast from heaven. After Adam and Eve were created, Satan deceived Eve into taking what had been forbidden by God. Adam also took of the same and so both entered into sin and sin entered into mankind.

Now you may say that it doesn’t seem fair that the downfall of all mankind should hinge on the disobedience of a single act by someone else, after all we didn’t even get a say in the matter.

Shouldn't man have been given another chance?

The problem is man would have made the same choice. It only took one sin for all mankind to become sinners.

Robyn tells the story of when she was growing up taking a family vacation to visit the Grand Canyon. Lining a pathway there were a bunch of boulders. As is the nature of kids they did what kids do, they hopped onto a boulder and began jumping from one boulder to the next. Maybe they were told that it was dangerous to do that, maybe not, but in the mind of a kid, you don't think too much about the consequences. Here's what she found out. Had they taken one step further or missed the boulder, down over the edge they would have gone. If you are standing on the ledge of a steep cliff, it only takes one step to fall off the cliff.

It only took one step to fall into sin.

In taking of the forbidden fruit, man doubted God's love by denying God's goodness, that God has our best interest at heart. Instead man believed his way was better. **"There is a way that seems right to a man but its end is death." Proverbs 14:12**

Man doubted God's Word and denied God's truth. In a recent Barna survey they found fewer people believe in the absolute truth of God's Word.

Man doubted God's authority and in doing so denied God's deity. In man's choice to take what God had forbidden, man essentially was saying that he wanted to be the authority in his life. Because man denied God's authority, he became God's enemy.

God told man not to eat the fruit, because the day that happened, he would die – die both physically and spiritually.

Now what happened when Adam and Eve sinned?

There were some immediate affects.

There was shame. They realized they were both naked and became ashamed.

There was fear. They heard God's voice and hid and it is still man's desire to hide his sin from God.

There was separation from God, where they wanted to be with Him, now they wanted to avoid Him.

There was expulsion from the garden.

They lost their lordship over creation. He no longer would have dominion over what was created. He would struggle to eke out a living.

There were other effects that came as a result of his wickedness.

Man's inner spirit became darkened. Paul told the Ephesians that they were no longer as other men whose hearts and minds had been darkened by sin, alienating them from God.

The soul became corrupt and debased. Again, Paul in writing to the Ephesians: **"Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." (4:19)**

Our bodies are also subjected to disease and death.

God did not wait to cast judgment on man for sin. There was an immediate judgment that was placed on Adam and Eve that would be passed on to every person from one generation to the next all because of the one sin.

It doesn't matter what gender.

It doesn't matter what race.

It doesn't matter what country you were born in.

It doesn't matter your economic status. All have sinned and consequently each one of us has a state that is

sinful by nature – **"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5);**

sinful by practice;

lost in sin – **“The Son of Man is come to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10);**
 spiritually dead – **“He has made you alive who were dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1);**
 under God’s wrath – **“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18);**
 awaits physical death; **Hebrews 9:27 “It is appointed unto man once to die, but after that the judgment.”**
 awaits spiritual death in hell because of sin.
Revelation 20:5 “Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

So don’t ever think that your sin won’t hurt anyone. There is a great ripple effect.

Sin or wickedness has been defined in Scripture as rebellion against God (Isaiah 1:2);
 a debt we have incurred (Matthew 6:12);
 disobedience (Ephesians 2:2);
 missing the mark (Romans 3:23; 5:12);
 transgression (I John 3:4);
 bending what is right, the word righteous means straight (II Samuel 24:17);
 unbelief (I John 5:10);
 ungodliness (Romans 4:5);
 iniquity (Galatians 5:19-21).
 Those who are wicked are the enemies of God.

We have been catapulted into this corrupt state because of the sin of one person. It has been passed on to us. When I was born I had no say in the genetic makeup of who I am. My height and eye color and gender, I didn’t have a say in any of it. Neither did I have a say in the sin nature that was passed on to me just as I have no say in it being passed on to my children.

The effects of the original sin are far reaching and if nothing is done about it, the consequences are eternal.

Now notice what the writer says about the wicked in our verse. **“They flee.” But what do they flee from? Monsters or ghosts?** They run even though no one is chasing them. What they are really running from is a guilty conscience. They imagine someone is chasing them. Fleeing speaks of rapid movement away from someone or something, usually implying an escape from some real or imagined danger.

There was once a boy who was walking along a road by a farmer’s house. He happened to notice a hen’s nest in the ditch with some eggs in it. He argued that as long as he didn’t have to go into the farmyard to get the eggs, he could take them because he found them.

Down into the ditch he went and filled his pants pockets with the eggs. The next difficulty was getting out of the ditch without breaking them, but he managed to do so, but he found that walking across the plowed field was difficult.

Then he heard a man shout and thought the man was calling for him, but didn’t want to get caught with the eggs so he began to run. As he ran he fell and when he fell he broke all the eggs in his pocket. Getting up he looked around, but didn’t see anyone. The man he thought was pursuing him was only calling to a farmer in another field.

When you pass a police car sitting in the median, do you pass by in confidence or do you look in the rear view mirror with a little fear? A guilty conscience steps on the breaks to slow down when a police car is in view. **When you turn in a test do you tremble a little inside?** A guilty conscience that has cheated will wonder if he will get caught.

The wicked run away even though no one is pursuing because of a guilty conscience. It bears repeating, but Adam and Eve illustrate for us the tendency that when we do wrong we seek to hide so we don’t get found out. God was not stalking them,

He was just walking in the garden when Adam heard Him and he ran away to hide. When he was asked why he hid, what was the response? **“I was afraid.”**

Our conscience condemns us.

“The wicked flee when no man pursues them.”

The tense speaks of something that is uncaused.

One author suggests they are “pursued by terrible images that arise in their own wicked conscience, even when no external danger threatens” them.

So here we are in this condition of wickedness. We are all in that state. **What can be done about it?** I said a moment ago that there were two groups of people – the wicked and the righteous. I also said there is both a negative and a positive side to that word impute. We looked at the negative side, now let’s look at the positive side.

Our verse says that **“the righteous are as bold as a lion.”**

The individual who is righteous has courage from God to do right behavior. The word **bold** is in the future tense and means that the behavior happens continuously. His aim or desire is to do right, both in conduct and in character.

Let’s talk for a moment about the righteous. The word itself means conformity to an ethical or moral standard. Originally it meant to be straight and so over time the word began to describe something that was a norm. **Romans 3:23** tells us that the standard or norm for right behavior is the character of God, we have all fallen short of His standard. We have missed His mark. To be righteous then is to have your heart right with God. Righteousness does not come from being good, but rather being good comes from being righteous. Righteousness is a gift we receive at salvation and is not earned.

Titus 3:5

Ephesians 2:8-9

Here’s where the word IMPUTE comes in. None of us are righteous by nature. We aren’t born that way. Neither are any of us righteous because we earned it or deserve it.

Psalm 32:1-2 “Blessed is he whose transgressions (wickedness) are forgiven, whose sins (wickedness) are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin (wickedness) the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is not deceit.”

The phrase **“count against”** is the term impute if you were reading the KJV.

Verses 10-11 tell us the kind of person whose sins are forgiven and whose transgressions are not counted. **“Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in Him. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart.”**

The righteous are the ones who trust in the Lord for salvation, who by faith believe that Jesus’s death, burial and resurrection are the only way to merit eternal life and so they have repented of their wickedness, turned from their sin and now are pursuing to please God with right character and right conduct. Their righteousness is not their own, their righteousness comes from God. They are the ones who can be bold now and especially when they stand before God. If, on the day they stand before God and He were to ask them why He should let them into His heaven they can confidently say that it is because of the shed blood of Christ who died for them and their sin. God has imputed the righteousness of Christ to us.

Let me illustrate the principle of what the word impute means. Let’s say I have various pieces of colored glass. If you pick up a piece of red glass and look through it, what color does everything appear to be? It is red.

How about yellow? Or green? Or blue?

When God looks at us, He no longer sees us wicked, sinful, He looks at us through Christ. Because Christ was perfect, God now sees us the same, through Christ. He sees us through the holiness of His Son. God has imputed our sin to the account of Christ **“who His own self bore our sin in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness.” (I Peter 2:24)**

“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous (wicked), to bring you to God (I Peter 3:18)

God then imputes the righteousness of Christ to our account. His righteousness has been credited to us.

My guess based on my own experience is that quite often you receive notices in the mail from the bank or from other institutions telling you that you have been pre-approved with immediate acceptance to receive a charge card with a certain amount of credit. They are assuming you will be trustworthy to pay your debt so they extend to you credit.

Through the gospel offered to us by God through His Son we have received a righteous credit based on the faithfulness of Christ to pay our debt. Our debt is sin. We can't pay it, and because we can't pay it we are destined for judgment. Christ came along and said He would pay our debt for us by dying on the cross for sins, because the payment for that debt was death. Now faith isn't enough to save us. We needed God to impute or transfer the righteousness of God to our account on account of our faith. For God to impute Christ's righteousness to us we must believe. **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” (Acts 16:11)** At that moment the righteousness of Christ becomes ours.

As we look back at our verse in **Proverbs 28:1**, the righteous are those whom God looks at through the person of His Son.

Let me share a story with you from the words of Martin Luther himself as he lectures in 1515 at the University of Wittenburg on Romans.

“I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, ‘the justice of God,’ because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage Him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry god, but rather hated and murmured against Him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that ‘the just shall live by his faith.’ Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on new meaning, and whereas before the ‘justice of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.”

From that simple admission Luther became the pivotal key in the Great Reformation. Becoming a new creation in Christ his righteousness helped him become a bold lion speaking publicly in defense of the gospel that the just live by faith. For his boldness on the issue of righteousness he stood trial and was executed for his faith.

In writing about the faith and testimony of Martin Luther, John Piper writes “may the gospel of God's free righteousness take us captive like it did Martin Luther, and radically free us from fear, so that we can be as bold as a lion for the sake of the gospel.”

Here's boldness for the righteous. **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."** (Romans 1:16)

Philippians 1:27-28 is where our righteousness becomes practical. **"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you."** In a sense he's telling them to be bold as a lion in their faith by always living right.

As there are consequences for the state of wickedness we are all born in so there is also a change in the state of the man or woman who by faith becomes righteous through Christ.
 He becomes a new creation – II Thessalonians 5:17
 He is saved – II Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 2:8-9
 He is dead to sin – Romans 6:11; I Peter 2:24
 He becomes a child of God – John 1:12; Gal. 3:26
 He is under God's favor – Ephesians 1:3
 He waits for God and glory – Philippians 3:20-21
 He is sure of heaven – II Timothy 4:18

In our study of Proverbs we have wanted to look at the practical side of what being a Christian is all about. The doctrine of imputation is more than just an assurance of salvation. There is a practical nature that results when we practice or live the righteousness of Christ.

Being righteous is not just about God seeing us through the lens of Christ as without sin, it is also striving in this life to live like Christ. Peter gave this admonition **"But just as He which has called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"** (1:15-16)

In writing about the return of Christ John writes **"Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."** (3:2-3)

Pastor H.A. Ironside wrote "Sin keeps men in continual dread; but the consciousness that one is seeking to please God, and walk in righteousness before Him and before men, inspires with holy confidence and almost superhuman courage."

On occasion I will end an email with these words, words I think are fitting to conclude our message. Solomon told his son that the righteous are bold as lions, so in light of that
 Live courageously
 Stand firmly
 Pray fervently
 Let me add – live righteously