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Paul's Doctrine of Sin

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SIN is a most patent fact in human existence — the reality of sin does not need to be argued. Sin is a fact of experience, of observation, and of revelation. Sin is something I feel in my own heart; it is something I observe in others, even in my own loved ones and best friends; and it is something revealed in the Bible. The policeman pursues it, the physician prescribes for it, the law discovers it, conscience condemns it, God controls and punishes it, and yet nobody likes to own it. But as a matter of fact sin is the only thing anybody really owns; he is a steward of everything else he may possess. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). Obvious as sin is, there is a tendency in all of us to treat it like some folks treat their unworthy relatives: it is ignored and even denied.

SIN may be defined, but it cannot be explained. To explain sin is to explain it away. How sin got started in the universe is a profound mystery. It had no place in the original creation, which God pronounced good. Sin is a parasite, an interloper, an outlaw cell in the moral system, and a terrible monstrosity. After sin had defiled the heavens it made its appearance on earth in a garden of delights, turning this fair earth into a wilderness of woe. In the original creation we read only of heavens and earth, but later we are told of a place prepared for the devil and his angels.

SIN is a cheat, a deceiver, and destroyer. It promises pleasure and pays off in pain; it promises life and pays off in death. It promises good and rewards with bad; it promises prosperity and rewards with poverty. Every sin is committed for profit. Nobody would ever sin if he did not think it would profit in some form or other. There is

profit in sin, but it is shortlived. Moses took the long look and made the wise choice: he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproaches of Christ of greater riches than the treasures of Egypt (Heb. 11:24f).

SIN is dangerous beyond words to express. Sin is violation of the moral law of God, and violated law cries out for just retribution. Sin is against God the Judge of all the earth, and must be accounted for before His judgment bar. Crime is against human society; sin is against God. Human society may punish crime, but only God can punish sin. Society may fail to punish crime, but God will not fail to punish sin. All crime against men is also sin against God, but all sin against God is not crime against man. Society punishes men for what they do; God punishes men for what they are and according to what they do. Every sin will be punished by God either in the sinner or in his Surety and Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What did Paul think about sin? What is the doctrine of sin according to Paul?

I.

SIN IS UNIVERSAL AND HEREDITARY

Paul says that all have sinned, and there is none righteous, no, not one; that none understands, and that none seeks God (Rom. 3:10, 11, 23). He says that the law of God stops every mouth from boasting and brings the whole world in guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).

Paul also taught that sin is hereditary. All are by nature (Gk. *phusis*) the children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). Dr. Conner does not think Eph. 2:3

refers to what one is by natural or physical birth, but I do. The Greek word *phusis* occurs in the New Testament eleven times. Ten times it is translated "nature", and one time "kind", meaning species (Jas. 3:7). Webster defines nature, (1) Essential character or constitution. In Gal. 4:8 Paul tells the Galatians, that before their conversion, they served them which by nature are no gods; that is, they did not have the essential character of a true God. In Gal. 2:15 Paul employs the word nature (*phusis*) for those who are Jews by natural birth to distinguish them from the Gentiles. Webster defines nature, (3) Innate or inherent character, disposition, or temperament. And so Paul is saying in Eph. 2:3 that all by inherent character are children of wrath, rather than children of God.

In Ps. 51:5 David confesses a sinful nature received at birth: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me." Here David is not wasting reflection on his mother's virtue, but confessing to a sinful nature received from his mother. The early appearance of sin in the child is proof of inherent depravity. The very first acts that discover reason in the child have sin in them. Watch the baby when reason begins to dawn, and it will express its nature by doing harm to others, by lying, by pride of apparel, or by inclination to revenge, or by disobedience. Have not most parents pacified the baby by beating that which had hurt or offended it?

In Ps. 58:3 we read that "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." In the diary of Andrew Fuller under date of January 8, 1785, are these words: "Much affected today hearing my little girl say, 'How soon Sabbath day comes again.' Felt grieved to see the native aversion of the carnal heart to God so soon discovering itself."

Let us next consider what Paul taught about the extent of sin in the individual. He not only taught that sin had reached to every man, but that it had also reached to every part of every man. He is also in line with other writings which show that the sinner is totally depraved; that is, that all the faculties are affected by sin. Total depravity is often misunderstood. The doctrine does not mean that every man is as mean as the devil, or as mean as he can become. The word "total" is a word of extent, not of degree. Total depravity means that man in all his parts or faculties is ruined by sin. I recently heard a preacher deride and ridicule the doctrine of total depravity. He said if a man is totally depraved, he is as mean as he can be. He pointed to a baby and said how ridiculous to think that it could be as wicked as the devil. To illustrate the doctrine, drop a grain of arsenic in a glass of water, and all the water is poisoned. But put more drops in it, and it is more poisonous, not in extent but in degree.

Paul also taught an inherited disability to do good. If man is totally (in all his faculties) depraved, there is no faculty that is capable of pleasing God. He says that to be carnally minded is death, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7, 8). Our Lord's teaching was to the same effect. He said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last

day" (Jno. 6:44). A little later, Christ put the same truth in other words: "Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (Jno. 6:65). These verses need little comment, their meaning is so plain. As an auxiliary verb "can" denotes ability to do a thing. Christ is saying that no man has the ability to come to Him except the ability be given him of God. This also explains what drawing to Christ is: it is giving ability to come to Him. Of course, this is not any physical ability, for coming to Christ is not a physical act. It is a mental and heart exercise produced by the Holy Spirit, and so our church covenant begins as follows: "Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour."

Dr. T. T. Shields tells of a ministers' meeting at which a self-styled orthodox brother delivered a message on Total Depravity. After he had concluded and was about to leave, he was challenged by a liberal brother of keen mind, who asked him

if there was anything in the unregenerate sinner that could respond to the gospel. The orthodox answered that there was — that every man has a free-will. He was then asked if that in the sinner that could respond to the gospel was good or bad. And of course the answer was that it had to be something good. "Then," said his critic, "Man is not totally depraved as you have just preached, for you now admit there is something good in the sinner that can respond to the gospel." The man who had preached the sermon neither understood the doctrine of Total Depravity nor the doctrine of Free-will. There is nothing good in a totally depraved man, and free-will does not mean a will able to do good. A free agent is a person who is at liberty to act according to his choice, without compulsion or restraint. A free agent is at liberty both to keep the law and to believe the gospel, without compulsion; however, the liberty to do a thing and the ability to do it are not the same. The sinner is at liberty to trust the Lord, but he is not able to because his understanding is darkened and his heart is averse to God. Man wills according to his nature, and if his nature is bad, his will or choice will be bad. Everything and everybody acts according to their nature.

The view that many have of the unpardonable sin implies that every man can repent until he goes so far or so deep into sin as to render himself unable to repent. But the truth is that no sinner repents of himself. The Bible plainly teaches that both repentance and faith are Divine gifts. Paul says that the servant of the Lord should instruct those that oppose themselves; "if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25). In Acts 5:31 and 11:18 we are specifically told that repentance unto life is the gift of God. Moreover, the New Hampshire Confession says, in article VIII, that repentance and faith are sacred duties, and also inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God.

II.

THE ORIGIN OF SIN

How did the human race get like it is and has always been since the day of Adam? We have been thinking of sin as a state of nature: we will now

consider it as a condition of guilt. Is sin only a disease of nature or is it also a condition of guilt? Is sin something only to be treated or is it also something to be punished? Will the lost sinner wind up in a hospital or in hell? These are not idle questions.

How did sin get to be guilt rather than mere depravity of nature or moral disease? I would answer, that it is on the principle of imputation — Adam's sin was imputed or charged to all members of his race. All are agreed that Adam was the natural head of the race — every person was seminally in him. He begat children in his own physical and moral likeness, and this was after he sinned. Adam's children became heir to all his ills of body and soul. They inherit moral depravity and physical weakness ending in death.

The race is not what it was in original creation. It is in a fallen state because of the sin of the first Adam. In 1 Cor. 15:45, 47 Christ is called the last Adam and the second man. This is because Adam and Christ are public or representative men. Considered as individuals, Christ was not the second man nor the last Adam, for there were many men both before and after Christ. Now we have these two representative men before us in Rom. 5:12ff. What these two Adams did affected their respective races. The first Adam's sin brought the judgment of death to all his descendents; the last Adam's obedience brought life to all His people. And so there are two men, two acts, and two results. We are related to the first Adam by generation; we are related to the last Adam by regeneration. By nature we are in the first Adam; by grace we are in the last Adam. While in unbelief we are in the first Adam; by faith we are in the last Adam.

THE GUILT COMPLEX

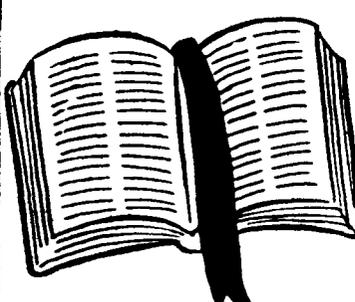
Pelagius, in the 5th century, contended that Adam's sin affected nobody but himself. Arminians are semi-pelagians, and believe that while all men have a depraved nature, this depravity of nature is not condemnable guilt, which means that we are not condemned for what we are, but only for what we do. If this is true, then how do we account for the universal guilt complex? Everybody has a religion because of this guilt complex. Any and every religion is for the purpose of getting rid of this guilty feeling. All people everywhere believe in a god or gods to which they are responsible. The religion of the Hindoos consists in the main of self-torment in an effort to get rid of guilty feeling. The Romanist goes to confession for the same reason — to get rid of the feeling of guilt. A man may restore what he has stolen to get guilt off his conscience. Even Atheism is a sort of religion by which one escapes the feeling of guilt by denying that there is any God and eternal judgment. So-called Christian Science attempts to escape the feeling of guilt by denying the reality of sin — sin is only a mental disease for which Christian Science has the only cure. Modernism would still the cry of guilt by denying that there is any real danger from sin. It seeks to help men lead tranquil lives apart from the atoning death of Christ. To this strange religion, guilt is only a subjective feeling apart from any objective ground or cause. They would have us fill our minds with good thoughts, think well of ourselves, and forget all about any hell or place of eternal punishment. Besides all these

religions, there are multitudes who try to find a measure of peace in thinking of the general mercy of God, apart from Christ as the Mercy-seat. I once belonged to this school of thought. When troubled about my sins, I would reason that God is merciful and that a merciful God would not send me to hell. And still others try to find rest of heart and peace of mind — they try to get rid of a guilt complex — by filling their minds with other things so that they will not be troubled with thoughts about God and the day of judgment. But blessed be God, and glory to His Name, the Christian finds peace of soul by trusting Christ Who made peace by the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20). The Christian expects to find mercy with God through faith in Christ, the true Mercy-seat. Out of Christ God is not merciful, but is a consuming fire.

The guilt complex is the result of a legal union between Adam and his race. If the reader will prayerfully ponder and carefully consider Rom. 5:12-19, he will be impressed with the legal terms: condemnation, justification, righteousness, etc. The first Adam's disobedience brought condemnation; the last Adam's obedience brought the gift of righteousness. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).

This is one of the lectures taken from the book "Lectures In Biblical Theology of The New Testament", by the late C.D. Cole.

If you desire a copy of this book please write: Bryan Station Baptist Church
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