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THE BIBLE DOCTRINE OF SIN

By: C. D. Cole

SIN is a patent fact: its existence 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 soul; it is something I see in others, even my best friends and loved ones; and it is something revealed in the Bible. The policeman pursues, the physician prescribes for it, the law discovers it, conscience condemns it, God controls it and punishes it; and yet nobody likes to own it. But as a matter of fact it is the only thing anyone owns; we are stewards of everything else we may possess.

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. Sin 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. Sin made its appearance on earth in a garden and turned it into a wilderness, after it had defiled the heavens. In the original creation we read only of heavens and earth, but later we read of everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

SIN is a cheat, a deceiver and a destroyer. It promises pleasure and pays off in pain; it promises life and pays off in death; it promises profit and pays off in poverty; the loss of all good. Every sin is committed for profit. Nobody would ever sin if he did not think it would profit in some

way. There is profit in sin, but it is short-lived. Moses took a long look and made the wise choice. Hebrews 11:24-26, *“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt:...”* He chose in view of a day of judgment.

SIN is universal for all have sinned. Romans 3:9-12, 18, 23, *“What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one...There is no fear of God before their eyes...For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”*

SIN is dangerous beyond words. Sin is violation of the moral law of God and must be punished. Crime is against human society and may or may not be punished by society. But sin against God will severally be punished. Every sinner will be punished either in his own person or in the person of a

surety, the Lord Jesus Christ who is the surety of a better covenant than the law covers. The only possible way I can escape punishment for my sins is to trust Jesus Christ who was punished for sins not his own, but for the sins of sinners.

FALSE DEFINITIONS OF SIN

MODERNISM: John Fiske (1842-1901): “Original sin is nothing more nor less than the brute inheritance every man carries with him, and the process of evolution is an advance towards salvation.” According to this view the human race is on the way to salvation; the race will be saved when the process of evolution has made it perfect. It is like improving the razor-back hog breeding. According to this view there is no individual salvation; it is only the ultimate salvation of the race. Poor hope for the sinner who cries out, What must I do to be saved?

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE: “Sin is a figment of a perverted imagination, an imaginary creature of mortal mind.” In other words: sin does not exist; it is not a reality. Some people just imagine they sin and this imagination is a disease of the mind. The man who is convicted of sin is unbalanced and the man who mourns over sin is insane. But such nonsense is refuted by science and Scripture and common sense. When the prodigal came to himself he

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said, "I have sinned." The insane man is the one who denies the fact of sin. I John 1:8-10, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

THE POPULAR VIEW: This view regards sin as only a crime against society. Sinners are young men sowing their wild oats, prostitutes, murderers and gangsters and such like. Some 75 years ago the Japanese resisted the preaching of Paul Kanamaro. They complained that he talked to them as if he were an official talking to convicts. They confounded sin with vice. They could not distinguish between sin and crime. Every person is a sinner, but all are not vicious or criminals. Many virtuous women but no sinless women. Many law abiding citizens, but no sinless men. Many beautiful babies but no baby is without a sinful nature. Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me." Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." Ephesians 2:1-3, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

SOME TRUE DEFINITIONS OF SIN

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION:
"Sin is any lack of conformity to, or transgression of the law of God."
Good definition and includes both sins of commission and sins of omission.

A. H. STRONG: "Sin is any lack of conformity to the law of God, whether in act, disposition, or state." This is a better definition, for it recognizes sin as a condition of human nature as well as an act. Sin resides in the heart; it is a quality of being.

I JOHN 3:4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Or, more literally, "Sin is lawlessness." There can be no sin where there is no law. If there is no supreme-lawgiver to whom we must give account, there can be no sin.

SIN IS MISSING THE MARK:
There is a Bible word which means to miss the mark, and it is translated sin some 200 times in the Bible. Man has missed the mark; he has missed the purpose of his being. Man was created to reflect the glory of His Creator, but he has sinned and come short of the glory of God. Man is like a clock that does not tell the time of day; he is like a car that won't run; he is like coal that won't burn. Man is a failure in the greatest of all enterprises; he has failed to glorify God and that is sin.

MAN IS OFF-CENTER: There is another word used to describe sin. This word means to "turn aside from the straight path." This conception of sin is expressed in Psalm 78:57 where God complains that Israel has "...turned aside like a deceitful bow." Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;..." Man is off-center. Instead of revolving around God and making God's will his chief delight, man has become a wondering star in the moral firmament.

SIN IS COMPETITION with God for sovereignty; competition in the real of authority. This view of sin is seen in the act of the first sin recorded in Genesis 3. The word sin does not occur in the act, but the fact of sin is there. And the nature of sin is clearly

revealed. Genesis 3:1-5, "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." In other words they would be a god unto themselves and know what was good and evil. They would not have to ask God what they could have or what they could do, they would be independent of God and do as they pleased. And when the deed was done, verse 22, "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil:..."

There is only one possible sense in which man became like God and that was in trying to be God in the matter of authority. He did not become like God in character for in sinning he lost his holy character and became a rebel against God. Nor did he become like God in the divine attributes such as power, holiness, and wisdom. In sinning man lost the power to live and died; he lost his original holiness and became depraved; he lost his original wisdom and became a fool. Sin brought death, depravity, and delusion. Sin is consummate folly.

The only possible sense in which man became like God was in spirit or attitude and aim; not in reality. Adam and Eve asserted the independence of God. They would make their own laws and do as they pleased. They rebelled against His will for their lives. They would determine for themselves; know for themselves, what is good and evil and what is right and what is

wrong. They would no longer be tied to the apron strings of God's word about what they could do. In spirit and aim they made themselves god. They entered into competition with God for sovereignty. Every sin is competition with God in the realm of authority. If I have the right to decide what is right and wrong, then I am God; I am supreme in the matter of authority. Sin is, therefore a declaration of independence before God and this means war. Isaiah 46:9, "...I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me." Exodus 20:3, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Great Britain could do little when the American colonies declared their independence; she lost the war. But God is not like Great Britain. The sinner is waging a hopeless war against God. God is a jealous God and will tolerate no rivals or competitors.

THE REALITY OF SIN

Is sin real? Ask Adam and hear him bemoan his loss of the garden of Eden. Genesis 3:23-24, "Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man;..." Is sin real? Ask Cain, Genesis 4:13, "And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear." Is sin real? Ask Abel, Genesis 4:9-10, "And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." Ask David and hear him say, Psalm 51:3, "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me." Is sin real? Ask the rich man in hell, Luke 16:23, "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." Is sin real? Ask Pharaoh Exodus 12:29-30, "And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the

firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt;..." Is sin real? Ask Peter and hear his confession: Luke 5:8, "...Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Is sin real? Ask Paul and hear him say, Romans 7:17-18, "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing:..." Is sin real? Ask the Son of God and hear him cry from the cross: Matthew 27:46, "...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Is sin real? Ask parents and listen to them pray over godless children. Is sin real? Ask the martyrs and let them tell you the price they paid because of their faithfulness to Christ.

The holier a man is the more sensitive he is to sin. A. J. Gordo, the great Baptist preacher of Boston, was a most godly man and yet just before he died he was overheard confessing his sins so much that he was thought to be delirious. Luther was wont to cry out, "Oh my sins, my sins." Jonathan Edwards was said to be the holiest man of his day, and yet in his diary he expresses such abhorrence of himself as would make one think he was the most wicked man of all.

THE POTENTIALITY OF SIN

Sin is an act of transgression is only a small part of sin. Just as the great mass of an iceberg is beneath the surface, so there is far more sin in everyone of us than appears on the surface in actual transgression. Potential evil is all the same in every person. If one has not sinned outwardly the same as some others it is due to restraining grace and not to anything in his nature. Paul said Romans 8:5-8, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and

peace. 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." Paul was not talking about the mind of any particular person, but of the mind of humanity. John Bradford: "There I go but for the grace of God."

SALVATION THROUGH A COOPERANT

The sinner is God's competitor; the Saviour Jesus Christ is God's cooperant. The first Adam competed with God for sovereignty; the last Adam cooperated with God for our salvation. The first Adam said, "I will;" the last Adam said, John 6:38, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Luke 22:42, "...nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." The first Adam despised the will of God; the last Adam said, Psalm 40:8, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." I Corinthians 15:45, "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam a quickening spirit." And God's will led Him along the path of suffering through gloomy Gethsemane to Calvary, where He cried, John 19:30, "...It is finished:..." All men are victims of the awful tragedy of Eden; all lives are victors through the terrible tragedy of Calvary. I John 2:1-2, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world [Jew and Gen-

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