

What You Should Know About Sin and Salvation



by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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Introduction

Sin and salvation. The two relate to each other like disease and cure, problem and solution, alienation and reconciliation, war and peace, death and resurrection.

Sin and salvation are usually considered as two separate subjects. In theology the doctrine of sin is called Hamartiology, after *hamartia*, the most common Greek word for sin. The doctrine of salvation is called Soteriology, after *soteria*, the Greek word for salvation.

One can investigate the subject of sin by itself. All of its destructiveness and guilt can be exposed, held up to scrutiny and carried to its ultimate punishment like a condemned man being led from his death cell to the place of execution.

That is not the case with salvation. Salvation cannot be considered apart from what a person is being saved *from*. To be saved from drowning implies that there is water. To be saved from a burning house implies that there is fire. To be saved from guilt and punishment implies that there is sin.

So in order to come to a clear and intelligent understanding of sin and salvation, we are going to examine the two together. We will begin with sin and proceed to salvation. That is the logical order.

Chapter 1

What Is Sin?

What Sin Is Not.

Before we understand what sin *is*, we must first understand what sin is *not*.

Sin has to do with morality, not ontology. That is, sin is not a *thing*. It is not some mystical, metaphysical substance or essence. Sin is not something that was forced on us, an evil "essence" that is part of our very being that makes us evil without our knowledge, consent, or responsibility.

Sin is not an accident, calamity, or event that happened *to* us. We are not sin's victims; we are sin's perpetrators. Yes, we suffer the consequences of our sins and the sins of others; however, those are the results of choices and not something impersonal. For that very reason it is misleading to refer to sin as a "disease" or in any way that gives the false impression that we are not personally responsible for sin.

What Sin Is.

As we shall see, the Bible correctly and consistently defines sin as a *choice*. All of the words for sin that are used in the Scriptures describe voluntary acts of the will.

In the Old Testament certain violations of ritual or legal requirements were called sins (e.g., "sins of ignorance"). These had no moral character in themselves, except as they were done in an attitude of self-will and rebellion. They would be like a person not returning to his/her car in time to avoid a parking ticket, or a driver so engrossed in thought that he/she is cited for driving 30 miles per hour in a 20 miles per hour school zone. These are known as "infractions" and do not necessarily imply "moral turpitude." In the Old Testament these laws and regulations had instructional value under the Law of Moses; therefore they had to be atoned for by sacrifices. The Law was illustrating the relationship between sin and forgiveness. Nevertheless, when the Bible speaks about real sin, it consistently defines it as a deliberate and voluntary choice.

Moral Agents.

God, angels, demons (including Satan), and responsible human beings are *moral agents*. That is, they possess the ability to make free, conscious, responsible choices under light (value perception and recognition).

Of course, God's choices are always in accordance with His full and perfect knowledge of what is intrinsically valuable. He never deviates from what is absolutely true, right, and in the best interest of Himself and His creatures.

The good angels also choose what is right in accordance with their moral knowledge (light). By contrast, demons (including Satan) have resolutely set themselves to do evil.

That leaves human moral agents (people) as the battleground of good versus evil. All who are moral agents and therefore are capable of moral choices have sinned against God and the greater good of others and even of themselves. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

God has secured and is still securing the repentance, salvation, and heart-obedience of many. So the Holy Spirit continues His work of convicting sinners and bringing them to repentance and faith in Christ.

Unavoidable Choice Between Two Alternatives.

When a person becomes a moral agent through personal and mental development ("age of accountability") and the perception of the intrinsically valuable ("light"), that person must and will make a moral choice. That choice will be between two alternatives: God or self. There is no third mode of moral action. When the person perceives, however simply, that God exists and therefore is supremely valuable, and that the well-being of others is just as valuable as his/her own, the moral agent is perceiving moral reality. Reason demands that the person choose in accordance with perceived intrinsic value and thus moral reality—to love God with all the heart, mind, and soul, and to love others as himself/herself (Matthew 22:37-40).

For one reason and one reason only would a moral agent choose against reality and reason. That is to choose self and self-gratification supremely instead of God and in opposition to God and the true well-being of others. And so, either God rules or self rules. That is the issue that faces every moral agent. These two alternatives are mutually exclusive and hostile. "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God" (Romans 8:7 NASB).

What would happen if in a group of "nice," friendly, polite people you were to say, "Let's talk about Jesus Christ." You just committed a *faux pas*. The atmosphere is charged, and *you* did it! You are the offender. You find yourself surrounded by hostility: embarrassed silence, sharp glances, muttered groans, a flippant retort, a quick change of the subject. The hostility is not against you; it is against Him. You just happened to mention His name. You don't *do* that in "polite" company.

The choice to please self supremely is sin. That choice is the voluntary and determined set of the soul ("will," "heart"). The ways people put that choice into practice are called sins.

The New Testament Words For Sin.

For our present purpose it will be sufficient only to list and define the original New Testament Greek words for sin. Here they are as transliterated into English.

paraptoma—"falling away or aside when one should have stood" (trespass, offense);

asebeia—"irreligion or deliberate irreverence" (ungodliness);

anomia—(lawlessness; iniquity);

parabasis—"going beyond a boundary" (transgression);

adikia—"unrighteousness" (including injustice);

hamartia—"missing the mark" (*i.e.*, aiming at the wrong end or goal). This is the most common word for sin in the New Testament.

It is important to keep in mind that the Scriptures always assume that sin in its true, moral sense is voluntary and therefore that the person who commits it carries the responsibility and guilt for it. This fact is so established and self-evident that the Bible makes little or no attempt to prove it. Except for "offenses" against the Old Testament ceremonial laws, the Bible words for sin consistently refer to morally responsible acts of the will.

Proverbs 1:29 "They hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD."

Isaiah 65:12 "You ... chose that in which I do not delight."

Isaiah 66:3 "They have chosen their own ways."

Chapter 2

The History And Progress Of Sin

Satan.

Until Satan and the angels who followed him unreasonably and wickedly rebelled against the just and holy God, all of creation enjoyed supreme and unmixed happiness. All moral agents (angels) knew their proper place in the structure of being and lived harmoniously in it. Voluntary, total obedience to God and His universal and just moral authority resulted in the highest good of all and to all.

Then one of the archangels selfishly chose to act against all reason and reality. He acted against the truth by attempting to exalt himself above God. He must have devised a persuasive though irrational deception, for he was able to persuade many of the angels to follow him. Jesus said, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources [character], for he is a liar and the father of it." (John 8:44). In 1 John 3:8 we read, "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning."

Adam And Eve.

Not content to deceive only his spirit followers, Satan spread his cosmic rebellion to earth, targeting God's special creation, Man. First, he deceived Eve, who in turn led her husband, Adam, into disobedience. We read the account in Genesis, chapter 3. Speaking of Adam, the apostle Paul writes that "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

The Days Of Noah.

Sin became universal. By Noah's time it had also become intolerable in human society. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5 KJV). "And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth" (verse 12 KJV).

God made a new beginning in Noah and his family. But before long sin again became universal. This was due to the fact that human beings left to their own passions and the influences Satan and society will invariably follow their own desires.

Universal Moral Depravity.

The depraved moral condition of the pagan world is graphically described in Romans 1:18-32.

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. ²⁷Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

²⁸And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, ³⁰backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³²who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."

As one reads the divine indictment, one realizes how deep, how widespread, and how persistent human moral depravity has been and continues to be.

We read a similar indictment in Ephesians 4:17-19.

¹⁷This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; ¹⁹who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

This is parallel to the passage in Romans 1. Truly, "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

Universal moral depravity is just that—universal. Every moral agent except Jesus Christ has sinned and most continue to do so.

"Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?'" (Proverbs 20:9).

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him [Christ] the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

"But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

"As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one'" (Romans 3:10, quoting from Psalm 14:3).

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

"But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe" (Galatians 3:22 NIV).

During a time of deep repentance, the psalmist David looked back over his entire life and declared, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). This is the strong poetic language of David's penitential psalm, expressing the fact that he had been a sinner from the inception of his moral ability and accountability, and that his mother had also been a sinner. He is confessing his generational pattern of sinning.

Despite all the denials to the contrary, all of us have sinned. It is in either our personal past or our present practice, or in both. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10. The good news is in verse 9).

God has provided a way—*the way*—to save us from the guilt, the penalty, the power, and the practice of our sin. It is in Jesus Christ. He is our complete and total Savior!

Personal sin.

All sin is a choice, a commitment of the heart (will). The soul of the wicked desires and chooses what is evil (Proverbs 21:10). Sin is personal. Even what are called "societal sins" are the accumulated and combined sins of the individuals of that society, though not all knowingly and willingly participate in the evils of the society where they live.

Jesus said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy,

pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man" (Mark 7:20-23).

Temptation.

First, we are tempted. Temptation itself is not sin; it is only the invitation to sin. Temptation comes in various ways and from various sources. 1 John 2:16 says "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world." The Bible also refers to these as "the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Ephesians 2:3).

Some cravings are unnatural and must be acquired, such as drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. On the other hand, many desires are natural and are given to us by God for our good and enjoyment. Natural desires become our tempters when they demand unreasonable and forbidden gratification; that is, when they seek to control us by urging us to obey them in opposition to reason and the word of God.

We do not have to suppose that there is some evil principle or "disease" in us that is the source of our temptation. The Bible makes it very clear that temptations arise from our own human desires. In James 1:13-15 the word of God states, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God': for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown brings forth death." "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" (James 4:1).

It has been said that our feelings have no brains! Feelings are neither right nor wrong in themselves; they just *are*. They are involuntary responses to persons, places, and situations. The feelings we experience when we look at a beautiful sunset are different from the feelings we experience when we look at a pile of garbage. What matters is what we *do* with our feelings. We are not to "throw them around" or let them go wild. We are to keep them under the control of our reason and the word of God, and use them for their proper purposes. We are not to allow them to grow undisciplined, clamor for control, and become our dictators. They are our servants; they must not become our masters. When we give our desires control, we lose control.

The discipline of children's emotions is one of the basic responsibilities of parenting. Parents are to develop in their children a disciplined, healthy set of emotions, so that the maturing person will be able to control his or her own emotions. Of course, to do this parents must have learned to discipline their own emotions.

The appeal to the forbidden indulgence of natural desires was one of the ways Satan approached our first mother, Eve. She "saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise" (Genesis 3:6). These three appeals correspond to "the lust of the flesh, the lust

of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16), and also the three temptations that Satan presented to Jesus (Matthew 4). Two of the three were natural desires that Eve was tempted to indulge in violation of God's injunction. Where Eve failed, Jesus overcame.

When Jericho fell to the Israelites, a man by the name of Achan sinned by taking an "accursed thing"—something consigned to destruction. In Achan's confession we see the progression from temptation to condemnation. He said, "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it" (Joshua 7:21). Notice the progression: "coveted ... took ... hidden."

Jesus said, "Every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28 NASB). There is a difference between looking *and* lusting, and looking *to* lust. Looking *and* lusting is a momentary temptation, an involuntary stimulation that must be rejected immediately and ignored. To look *to* lust is a purposeful look intended to stimulate and indulge the lust. It is yielding to the temptation; it is sin.

Also, it is one thing to *admire*; it is another thing to *desire*. One can admire his neighbor's new car without desiring it. What he admires about his neighbor's new car might persuade him to buy one like it (if he can afford it). But to desire what someone has even if it would mean depriving its owner of it is covetousness. It is sin. Likewise, one can admire his neighbor's wife without desiring her. What he admires about her might inspire him to find a wife with similar qualities and establish a stable marriage and home life. But to desire someone's wife even if it would mean taking her away from her husband (or wishing he could) is adultery. It is sin. He might even wish that her husband would die. That compounds the sin.

Some people are tempted by the desire for riches. "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition" (1 Timothy 6:9). A person can be "flat broke" and still in his heart be a slave to the love of money.

Sin has no place in the Church. Christ rebuked the church at Pergamos because they tolerated those who held "the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality" (Revelation 2:14). He also rebuked the church at Thyatira because they allowed a woman "to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols" (Revelation 2:20).

When I was a teenager, I heard a woman in the church say that the sins of the flesh do not matter because the flesh is going to be destroyed anyway. Gnosticism is still with us.

Satan is the chief tempter. Satan has had thousands of years of experience with the human race. Ever since his success with Adam and Eve, Satan has studied human beings, observing our emotional responses and behavioral patterns. He has learned what works most effectively, and he has honed his diabolical manipulative skills. Satan knows our "hot buttons," and he pushes them with devastating results.

In Acts 5:3 and 4, the apostle Peter asked Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ... Why have you conceived this thing in your heart?"

Now, how did Satan "fill" Ananias's heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? Did the devil take the "lid" off and "pour" something into his heart? Of course not. Satan succeeded in filling Ananias's heart by focusing the man's attention on the object, thus generating the corresponding emotional desire and in this way persuading him to make the selfish choice to lie. The devil did not "make him do it." Persuaded, yes; made him, no. For that reason Peter asked him, "why?"—the question he never answered and that was unanswerable.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church, "For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain" (1 Thessalonians 3:5).

We must all be aware of Satan's schemes and on our guard against them, "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11).

The ungodly world around us is also a source of temptation, and Satan uses it to create a powerful public momentum of devastating moral rebellion and corruption. "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16).

Some are led into temptation by deceptive world-views and those who promote them. Secular education and the "main stream" media are notorious for this. "For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through licentiousness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption" (2 Peter 2:18, 19).

"My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Proverbs 1:10).

Jesus urges us, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

So then, first we are tempted. If we reject the temptation, we do not sin. If we yield to the temptation, we sin. We surrender ourselves to mindless desire in opposition to the moral law—the law of God and of reason. Remember, our feelings have no brains.

Sin.

Now is a good place to review James 1:14, 15. "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when sin has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

Temptation "conceives" the moment it gains the consent of the will. Sin is committed the moment the will surrenders to the temptation, even though it might not "give birth" to the outward act immediately (and perhaps never have the opportunity to do so). When sin is fully developed, it gives birth to death.

So then, reject temptation. It is the "father" of sin and the "grandfather" of death!

The commitment of the will to pursue and be ruled by the gratification of one's desires is called the "carnal mind." It is the "minding of the flesh" described in Romans 8:5-8. "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to 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, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

The "carnal mind" is not an ontological "thing." It is a set purpose and attitude. That kind of mind, purpose, attitude cannot please God, and therefore people who are in that mind-set cannot please God. That mind-set is totally hostile to God and so are people who pursue it.

The result is spiritual death and eventually "the second death" (Revelation 20:14). Spiritual death is alienation from God because of one's sin. The sinful pursuit of one's own desires is total disobedience to God and therefore hostility to God. It shuts God out of the soul and prevents fellowship with Him. The person who lives in sin is dead in sin (verse 6). This death is not mystical; it is moral and relational. Our sins "killed" us spiritually (our relationship with God and our standing before Him).

"She who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives" (1 Timothy 5:6)

The good news is that God has provided the "new birth" in Jesus Christ. "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Colossians 2:13).

To "come alive" in Christ we must definitely and totally renounce what "killed" us (sin), and put our faith completely in the crucified and risen Christ.

Chapter 3

The Forms Of Sin

When we consider the various forms of sin, we must keep in mind that all sin is personal. Sin is a choice, and choices are made by individuals. As was mentioned in the last chapter, even societal sins are the accumulated and combined sins of individuals.

It is easy and it eases the conscience to deflect personal moral guilt and accountability by blaming sin on a particular group or class, or on society as a whole. Yet, no matter how or how much society or the "group" reinforces and institutionalizes the evil, the ultimate responsibility comes back to each individual moral agent. The divine command to repent of national and societal sins is still a demand for personal repentance.

Sin has one basic definition—selfishness. Sin is choosing to gratify one's own desires in opposition to reason—biblically informed reason that has been enlightened to an awareness of the truth. Sin is placing petty self-gratification over the real interest of God and others. It is a commitment of the soul to please one's self in spite of the consequences to God and to others, and even to himself/herself. Sin is spelled "sIn" because the big "I" is in the middle of it. The Bible labels it "unbelief."

Sin expresses itself in various forms. Sin produces sins. Some sins are of the flesh; some are of the human spirit.

In at least four passages The Scriptures record the great comprehensive divine indictment against sinners. They are Isaiah 59:1-15 (to ancient Israel), Romans 1:28-31 (of the pagan world); Galatians 5:19-21 (of unbelievers in general); and 2 Timothy 3:1-5 (of the unbelieving world in the end times).

The forms of sin can be grouped into several broad categories. That is how we will consider them, keeping in mind that sin is still sin however or in whatever form it is expressed.

Sexual Sins.

Sexual sins include: fornication (immorality in general and sex between unmarried persons in particular); adultery (sex outside of marriage by a married person); bigamy and polygamy; and sexual perversions (homosexual acts and practices, pedophilia, bestiality, incest, and sexual abuse).

Sexual sins are a violation of God's created and ordained order for human sexuality and sexual relationships. They degrade our sexuality and our very humanity. They are an assault on the God-established institution of marriage and therefore on the very fabric of civilized society. For that reason they are among the most serious of all sins.

A modern tendency is to diminish people's perception of the seriousness of sexual sins by asserting that they are no worse than other sins. The Bible refutes this dangerous idea. In 2 Peter 2:9 and 10 the apostle Peter clearly states: "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority." Please note the word, *especially*.

Gluttony.

Most people eat to live; some people live to eat. Gluttony is a sin. It is an unreasonable and harmful self-indulgence. Gluttony is a form of voluntary slavery to the appetites of the body. A glutton's gut is his god (Philippians 3:19). Gluttony violates our moral obligation to do everything to the glory of God, including our eating and drinking (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Chemically Induced Indulgences.

These include alcohol, tobacco and the non-medical use of drugs and narcotics. Again, these violate our moral obligation to do everything to the glory of God, including glorifying God in our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Hostile Acts And Attitudes.

These include such things as violence, robbery, cruelty, murder. These violate the law of love, the very essence of morality. "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15).

Sins Of The Tongue.

The sins of the tongue (mouth, lips) are among the deadliest sins of all. Our words reveal our true character because they come directly from the heart. Jesus said, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man" (Matthew 15:18-20).

The mouth is the fountain of the heart. Like a fountain, it can produce either sweet water or bitter, but not both (James 3:11, 12). Because the mouth reveals the heart, Jesus said that we will be judged by our words (Matthew 12:34-37).

As we see from our Lord's words recorded in Matthew 15:18-20, the tongue reveals the full range of the evils of the heart. The tongue also gives expression to those sins that are essentially verbal. These include: blasphemy, profanity, cursing, filthiness and vulgarity, lying, gossip, slander, evil speaking, backbiting.

"[T]he tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.

Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell" (James 3:5, 6 NIV).

Economic Sins.

Economic sins usually involve material things—money and what money can buy. In the larger sense, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:9 and 10). Economic sins include such things as: covetousness, greed, stealing, embezzlement, fraud, cheating, dishonest gain, gambling, and economic injustice and oppression. Slavery, including sexual slavery, is driven by the love of money. In many ways sinners sell each other "over the counter" of their greed.

Sins Of The Human Spirit.

"All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits" (Proverbs 16:2 NASB).

The list of the sins of the human spirit is long; it includes: pride and arrogance, expressions of self-will and rebellion, anger and outbursts of wrath, unnatural and unlawful infatuations, contention and strife, dissension and division, hate, bitterness, grudges, partiality and racism, hypocrisy, covetousness for the non-material things of others (spouse, reputation, influence, position), lust for power, unbelief.

Broad and Inclusive Categories Of Sin.

The Bible also identifies broad and inclusive categories for sin and sins. Romans 14:23 says, "whatever is not of faith is sin." Whatever we cannot do with an honest heart and a clear conscience in the light of what we believe, is sin.

"All unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17). Whatever does not "square" with the righteous requirements of the moral law is sin.

James 4:17 says, "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." Sometimes these are called "sins of omission." The only true "sins of omission" in the Old Testament were the "sins" of ignorance, the failure to keep the non-moral yet instructive regulations of the ceremonial part of the Mosaic jurisprudence. These regulations have been fulfilled in Christ and the New Covenant, and are now done away (Ephesians 2:14, 15).

If one's heart is right, a failure to act because of a lack of knowledge (light) is not a sin. If the lack of knowledge (light) is the result of rejecting the light and therefore willful ignorance of the light, the resulting failure is due to the sin of rejecting the light.

The sin defined in James 4:17 is not a mere oversight; it is a choice in

opposition to what a person knows (light), a choice *not* to do what the person is morally obligated to do. Carelessness and neglect can be due either to inattention or to selfishness. If they are due to selfishness, they are sin.

Ephesians 5:12 says that some sins are too shameful even to mention by name.

Again, let it be emphasized that all sin is *selfishness*, however it expresses itself. It is the choice and pursuit of self-gratification in opposition to reason. It can be the set course of life, or the choice of the immediate moment, or both. It is choosing to please one's self in disregard for the well-being, the interest, the good and happiness of God and others. *That* is what must be totally abandoned. The act of the will in doing so is called *repentance*.

Repentance is not a gradual process. No one truly repents on the "installment plan." Repentance is not like having an amputation one inch at a time. It is all at once and total. Just do it!

As we shall see when we come to the subject of salvation, repentance is only one condition of salvation. Salvation is not a "do-it-yourself-project." Only Christ can save us. We come into a personal relationship with Him. We become brand new (2 Corinthians 5:17), "born-again," and that which is born of God does not "do" sin (1 John 3:9). The person who is new in Christ Jesus must leave sin alone. *Period!*

Believers Died To Sin.

Romans 6:1-14 is a familiar passage of Scripture that describes the believer's liberating death to sin. Verse 2 says, "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (NIV). "For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace" (vs. 14 NIV).

"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24).

For those who desire to do an in-depth study of the Bible's commands to hate and abandon sin, see the following passages: Job 28:28; Psalm 34:14; 101:3; 119:104, 113; Proverbs 4:27; 8:7, 13; 14:16; Zechariah 7:10; Romans 12:9; 13:12-14; Galatians 2:20; 5:16; Ephesians 4:22; 5:1-12; Colossians 3:3-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:6, 14; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:11, 22; 1 Peter 2:11, 24; 3:1; 2 Peter 3:17.

We meet Christ at the cross. When Christ comes in, sin dies. Death to sin is the death that leads to life.

Chapter 4

Characteristics Of Sin

In this chapter we will explore and expose the true nature of sin. We will focus on the reality and the seriousness of selfish disobedience to the moral law, the law of love.

Sin is Deceptive.

A fable is told about a lady who was walking down a jungle path, when suddenly she came upon a brightly colored coral snake.

"I would look beautiful as a necklace," the snake said in a smooth, appealing voice. "Please pick me up and place me over your shoulders and around your neck."

"Oh, no!" the lady replied. "You would bite me and I would die!"

With its serpentine cunning the coral snake replied, "Oh, I would *never* do that to *you*. I just want people to see how pretty you will look." The coral snake's voice seemed so soothing, so sincere, so reassuring. "Please. I won't harm you. I just want to make you happy. You enjoy pretty things, don't you? Wouldn't you be proud to show me to your friends? Think how many compliments you will receive. Please pick me up. Please? *Please!*"

The lady paused and thought about it for a moment. The coral snake had such gorgeous colors. It *would* be a real attention-getter. It seemed so sincere in its promises. Its voice was kind and gentle.

So stooping down, she picked up the pretty coral snake and put it around her neck.

Instantly the snake bit her!

"You promised me you wouldn't bite me!" she screamed.

The snake hissed, "*You knew what I was when you picked me up.*"

Billy Sunday used to say, "One reason sin flourishes is that it is treated like a cream puff instead of a rattlesnake."

Sin is deceptive because it is unreasonable. Sin is always committed in opposition to reason. The inner conflict is between the reason and the choice of the will to please self in opposition to reason, no matter how the choice to please self supremely expresses itself. The Pharisees were highly regarded religious people, but they did all their works "to be seen by men" (Matthew 23:5). The motive was wrong; therefore all was wrong. It was all for self.

The constant remonstrance of reason and the Holy Spirit in the sinner's conscience makes him/her uncomfortable. The discomfort can range from a nagging sense that things are not right on the inside, to the sharp sting of an intense awareness of personal guilt. The sinner tries to suppress this discomfort. The defense mechanism is self-justification through rationalization. Because sin is totally unreasonable, reason is twisted into rationalization.

"I can't help it." "It's a sickness." "I was born that way." "It's my glands." "The devil made me do it." "It's my parents' fault." "People made me the way I am." "It's society's fault." "It's God's fault." "I'm just human." "We're all sinners." "I'm O.K." "I'm a good person." "I do a lot for others; it makes me feel good." "I'm a church member in good standing." "I'm better than ..." "All my friends do it." "Who said it's wrong?" "It's now socially acceptable." "It's just an outmoded religious taboo." "Don't impose your morality on me!" Rationalization *ad nauseam*.

Just before he was martyred, the apostle Paul prophesied that in the last days "evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). Earlier Paul had written, "Let no one deceive you with empty words" (Ephesians 5:6). We are living in a time of "empty words." Someone has said that we trade reality for words, and then we talk about the words. "Wordcrafters" are flourishing, because whoever controls the language controls the culture and the people, for good or for ill.

"Connotation words" are words that mean one thing to the speaker or writer and are chosen with the intent to deceive by associating the words with another meaning in the hearers and readers. For example, some will say, "I believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus." But when you pin them down, they will admit that to them "literal resurrection" has nothing to do with a body coming out of a tomb! They are using empty words to deceive.

The person who persists in sin does so in chronic hostility to his or her own intelligence. This results in self-deception, a deepening inner disconnect between reason and moral reality. The person literally becomes alienated from himself/herself.

Satan reinforces it with a full arsenal of conscience-salving rationalizations. He started with Adam and Eve. Since then he has had thousands of years to practice and perfect his art on human beings. No wonder he is so successful.

When God confronted Adam about his sin, Adam blamed Eve and at the same time indirectly blamed God Himself. "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). Eve in turn blamed the serpent. This "blame game" has been going on ever since.

When Moses confronted Aaron about the golden calf, this was Aaron's lame excuse: "So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" (Exodus

32:24 NIV). Yeah, right!

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20).

"We have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood we have hidden ourselves" (Isaiah 28:15).

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:9, 10).

"If it feels good, do it"— that is a prescription for disaster. So is "if it feels right, it can't be wrong." And here is a popular one: "just follow your heart." If our heart is not right with God, it will lead us astray.

Sin has been called moral insanity. This has nothing to do with one's I.Q., education, or skill in choosing effective means to secure what one is living for. Mental insanity is not generally the fault of the person. Moral insanity always is. It is self-incurred and self-perpetuated. It is using one's intelligence to devise and carry out means to achieve a totally unreasonable supreme end—self-gratification. It is making self the supreme being in one's self-created world, the center around which everything and everybody else revolves. This is irrational. No one can logically defend the proposition that the gratification of self is more important than the well-being of God and of others; yet that is how every sinner lives.

If the end is contrary to reason, all the mental and other means and resources used to achieve that end are also used contrary to reason. That is why the Bible says, "madness is in their hearts while they live" (Ecclesiastes 9:3). Notice, the insanity is in the heart, not the intelligence. Sinners live as though they have lost their mind. They are "crazy in the heart." They are fully responsible for their insane selfishness.

Concerning Balaam, the "soothsayer" (see Numbers 22 - 24), the apostle Peter writes: "he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet" (2 Peter 2:16).

In Hebrews 3:13 believers are urged not to be "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

Jesus said that if the light that is in us is darkness, "how great is that darkness" (Matthew 6:23). Light suppressed grows dim. Light rejected becomes darkness—great darkness! It has been said that no eyes are so blind as those that refuse to see.

Mental insanity is excusable; moral insanity is not. It is deliberate, willful

opposition to one's own intelligence. Concerning the pagan world Paul wrote, "Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). He goes on in chapter 2 to include the sinning Jews who judged the Gentiles for their sins while committing the same sins themselves.

Jesus said, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin" (John 15:22).

The greater one's moral knowledge (light), the greater is one's responsibility; therefore the greater is one's guilt in going against the light. Guilt increases in proportion to the amount of moral knowledge (light) one acts against.

The sinner's first truly intelligent act is to repent—to turn *to* God *from* sin. The pursuit of the selfish ultimate end must be immediately and totally abandoned. That is done only by choosing the right ultimate end—supreme love for God and equal love for others. Until that happens the sinner is merely "rearranging his sins"—changing means to the same selfish ultimate end, making "trade-offs" merely for "enlightened self-interest."

The prodigal son "came to himself" (Luke 15:17). He admitted the truth, ended the war of his heart (will) against his reason, reconciled his will to his reason, and acted accordingly. The result was reconciliation with his father. When we end our "moral schizophrenia,"—our self-alienation—by becoming reconciled to ourselves—to our own reason—by getting reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), reconciliation with others usually follows.

Sin Is Progressive.

In modern psychology it is asserted that if a person gives in to a strong emotion, especially one that has been "repressed," and allows it to express itself without inhibition, the emotion is thereby "released." It is also asserted that a behavior that is repeated is "reinforced." Now, it should be self-evident that both cannot be true. A desire that is indulged is gratified and therefore pacified for the moment; however, it is certainly not "released." Like a lion cub that is fed red meat, a desire that is fed will grow stronger. Desires, like babies, grow by being "nursed." Desires are developed by indulgence. If desires are given control, they will become increasingly demanding, despotic, and enslaving.

Pleasures become commonplace and boring. A bigger "charge" is required to achieve the desired effect. It takes more fuel to feed the fires of passion. If we put pleasure at "home plate," the cost becomes greater each time we "go around the bases."

"Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes" (Isaiah 5:18 NIV). The person who hauls around a load of sin is harnessed to a wagon that becomes heavier and heavier to pull; yet, his passions drive him on in spite of the sting of their lash. He is like a "beast of

burden," a willing, even willful, slave to the desires he has chosen to serve.

In the words of A. W. Tozer, "The greater the folly, the greater the fool."

Excuses are fabricated. The conscience becomes dulled. Restraints are thrown off. Selfishness rules. This is the way of all sin, from self-righteous pride to open perversion and violence.

Looking at the spiritual condition of the people of his time, Ezra the scribe cried out, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens" (Ezra 9:6 KJV).

Alluding to the words of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 6:9, 10, Jesus said of His generation, "Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them" (Matthew 13:14, 15).

Just before his death, the apostle Peter penned this scathing indictment of those who turn from the faith and also those who lead them astray: "When they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through licentiousness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage" (2 Peter 2:18, 19).

Sin is progressively enslaving and degrading. The saying is true: "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."

"The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast" (Proverbs 5:22 NIV).

The prophet Elijah said to Ahab, the wicked king of northern Israel, "You have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord" (1 Kings 21:20).

Later, in 722 B.C. the Assyrians captured Samaria, the capital of northern Israel, and deported the population. This brought the kingdom to an end. The spiritual depravity that brought about this divinely-permitted judgment at the hand of the Assyrians is detailed in 2 Kings, chapter 17. The charges are not the subjectively motivated opinion of some partisan "Yahwist"; they are rooted in the factual history of the northern kingdom and describe the very moral conditions that of themselves led to decay, decline, and downfall. Verse 17 says that they had "sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger."

The prophet Isaiah leveled a similar charge against the southern kingdom of Judah, saying that they had sold themselves for their iniquities (Isaiah 50:1). In

52:3 Isaiah promised them future deliverance from captivity: "You have sold yourselves for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money."

This reminds us of the words of Peter in 2 Peter 2:19. When people "sell out" to sin, they become the slaves of their chosen indulgences. Look at people who have grown old in sin. Imprisoned by their own passions and pride, held by the shackles of their habitual sinning, they have sunk down into the pit of their unbelief and corruption. They have hardened their character and fitted themselves for a horrific eternal destiny. Such reprobates are no suitable models for children and young people. On the contrary, they should serve as a solemn warning to all who are tempted to follow the path of sin.

"Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; he who guards his soul will be far from them" (Proverbs 22:5).

"By transgression an evil man is snared, but the righteous sings and rejoices" (Proverbs 29:6).

Jesus said, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34 NIV).

Paul said to Simon the sorcerer, "you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity" (Acts 8:23).

In Romans, Chapter 7 Paul described his moral and spiritual condition *before* his conversion. In verse 14 he describes himself as being "sold under sin." He had been a highly-regarded, self-righteous religious person, and yet all that time he was "sold under sin." In Galatians 5:1 Paul urges believers who are tempted to go back into the same legalism that had left *him* in bondage to sin: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again in the yoke of bondage."

In Romans 6:16 Paul echoes the words of our Lord. "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (NIV).

It is important to understand clearly that this enslavement to sin is a willing, even willful, enslavement. Notice in the passage in Romans 6:16 that the slave has "offered himself" to obey as a slave. He cannot free himself from his enslavement to sin as long as he is committed to be a slave to it.

We are told that one of the ways people in some parts of the world catch monkeys is to cut a hole in a gourd just big enough for the monkey to reach in. They hollow out the gourd and put something inside that the monkey wants. Then they tie the gourd to a tree or other object. The monkey reaches in and grasps the "goodie," but the hole is too small to pull it out. When they come to pick up the monkey, it screams, jumps up and down, and tries to pull away from the gourd. But the monkey will not let go! It is trapped. So they come and scoop up the monkey.

Just prior to his death Paul wrote to Timothy, instructing him to correct in humility those who are in opposition, "if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:25, 26).

When people honestly and with their whole heart turn to God from sin and place their whole trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior, then and only then will they be set free from bondage to their sin.

Sin Is Destructive.

In his book, The Invisible War, Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote: "Let the universe see once and for all that there is no joy, no peace, no happiness except in obedience to God."

Sin is not natural. If sin were compatible with our nature, it would suit us; it would be beneficial; it would promote our health, well-being and happiness; it would result in the greatest good to us and the highest glory to God.

This we know is not the case. In fact, reason, revelation, and universal experience clearly testify to the exact opposite. Think of all the human suffering and misery that is due to man's selfish violation of the universal moral realities that are rooted in our very being and revealed in the Scriptures. They are massive proof that sin is always and invariably destructive.

To put self as "number one" is to subordinate everything and everyone else, including God Himself, to self-interest and self-gratification. This is true whether the ruling passion is pride or plunder, religion or revelry, family or fornication. Self sits on the throne at the center and all other interests revolve around it. If the destructiveness of selfishness is held in check by the modifying and restraining influences of contradictory and competing selfish desires, it is not evidence of any morality or merit in the sinner. If the heart (ultimate motive) is wrong, all is wrong. Sinners always obey their strongest desires. Their strongest desires are what motivate them in both "good" behavior and "bad" behavior. They do "good" things out of "good" feelings, and "bad" things out of "bad" feelings. In either case they are merely obeying the strongest feelings of the moment. Even if a person gives all of his or her goods to feed the poor and even dies as a "martyr" for some cause, and does not do it out of genuine love for God and for others, it has no moral merit. The person is merely obeying his/her strongest passion.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" 1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

The good works done with a self-driven motive directly benefit the recipient(s); however, the selfishness of the motive is still destructive. It is hypocritical because it produces "good" works and behaviors from fickle feelings instead of from genuine, steadfast love. We all know of examples of "good" people who suddenly turn on spouse, children, and others. It is destructive because it tends to confirm the sinner in his or her delusion of personal goodness and righteousness, when in fact all such "righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). It is destructive also because it creates a phony "morality" that in fact omits any real love for God. This does great harm to one's self and to others by instilling in the mind a false view of morality, including one's own moral character. Morality is separated from religion, and that nullifies both. People who do not love God cannot truly love others; the selfishness that rejects God will also reject others if and when necessary to achieve its chosen gratification. For example, look at those "good" parents who do not love and obey God! If their children follow their example, it will lead them down to hell!

"One sinner destroys much good" (Ecclesiastes 9:18).

"As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death" (Proverbs 11:19).

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13, 14).

Chapter 5

The Consequences Of Sin

Sin has horrible consequences, both in this life and in the next. This follows from the fact that sin by its very nature is destructive—destructive in practice and totally destructive in its potential. Sin is not a plaything. It certainly is not a harmless indulgence.

"Fools mock at sin" (Proverbs 14:9). The original Hebrew behind this verse includes the frivolous way "fools" attempt to appease God.

In spite of all the harm and suffering that human sinning is causing worldwide every day, the tendency among the general public is to treat it lightly. It is dismissed as a weakness, when in fact it is willfulness. It is regarded as a trifle, when in fact it is a tragedy. It is excused as a mere fault, when in fact it is a felony. It is denied as a mere religious or cultural taboo, when in fact it is the undeniable reality in the entire drama of human suffering. In sociology and the social sciences, whenever human problems are discussed "there is an elephant in the room." Its name is *sin*.

Sowing And Reaping.

Many of the consequences of sin are the product of the operation of the inexorable law of sowing and reaping. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:7, 8).

Kind produces kind. Sow oats and you get oats. Sow sin and you get corruption. Sowing to the flesh and hoping for a "crop failure" is a losing gamble. On the other hand, sow to the Spirit and you get the fruit of the Spirit, including life everlasting.

The consequences of sin are not limited to the present time or the present generation. In Exodus 34:7 we read that God maintains His "mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." The two powerful points here are: (1) that the judgment that God often brings on sinners in this life has consequences that their descendants have to live with for three or four generations, and (2) that sinners usually lead their descendants to follow their example, committing the same sins and therefore suffering the same consequences.

An illustration from my own ministry experience is a good example of this. The well-known evangelist/theologian Charles G. Finney had a close friend who named his own son "Finney" in honor of Charles G. Finney. The son rejected

Christ and went his own way. So did *his* children, and then *their* children. In the early 1970's, when I was the pastor of Santiam Chapel in Lyons, Oregon, a school teacher and her family began attending the church. About the same time I taught a series of Wednesday night classes on what is called "moral government theology," using Charles G. Finney's Lectures on Systematic Theology as a text. The school teacher attended the classes. After she was converted she said to me that it was the study of "Finney's theology" that brought her to Christ. When she told her mother and her grandmother (neither of whom was a believer), they informed her that she was directly descended from the man who had been Charles Finney's friend. Her grandmother was a granddaughter of the man who had been given "Finney" as a first name. So far as I know, neither the mother nor the grandmother became believers. So, here we have a man who turned away from the truth, rejected Christ, went his own way, and helped send three generations of his own descendants into eternity without Christ. That was only one line of his descendants. It took four generations to restore just that one single line. Only God knows what happened to the others.

"Because of the iniquities of their forefathers they will rot away with them" (Leviticus 27:39).

The prophet Jeremiah lamented, "Our fathers sinned and are no more, but we bear their iniquities" (Lamentations 5:7).

Physical Death.

One of the universal consequences of sin is physical death. God said to Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). The literal translation is "dying, you shall die." Later, in 3:19 God said to Adam "Dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

Paul wrote, "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

God pronounced physical death on the entire human race because He had to do so. God foresaw that human sinning would become universal; therefore, to protect society from the unlimited effects of unrestrained sin, God put a limit on each person's opportunity to continue and to progress in sin in this life. Yet, as we have just noted, sin still has consequences beyond this life, both for the individual and for all whom he or she influences (family, friends, community).

Guilt.

By guilt is meant *real* guilt, not just guilt feelings. Guilt has to do with one's standing before God, the Judge of all.

It would be folly for a person who is found guilty of a crime in a court of law to protest to the judge: "But, your honor, I don't *feel* guilty." The judge would immediately and sternly remind the criminal of the facts of the case. Guilt is

based on facts, not feelings. Some human courts make mistakes; the court of God never does.

If a person sinned three sins a day (and some people sin three sins in three minutes), at the end of fifty years of sinning there would be against that person's record in the court of God *almost fifty-five thousand sins*. And that is just counting individual sins. Add to that the continuous, unyielding set of the will in the course of disobedience. Some boast that they will take their chance; they *have* no chance.

"My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me" (Psalm 40:12).

Alienation.

Another consequence of sin is alienation, especially alienation from God. This is called "spiritual death." As was stated earlier, spiritual death is not an inner metaphysical state, something that happens to the essence of either one's soul itself or one's spirit itself. It has to do with one's relationship with God.

Fellowship with the Father and the Son is the very essence of eternal life (John 17:3). Apart from that relationship there is no eternal life. Sin *prevents* fellowship with God. Sin shuts God out of the soul. Before we come to Christ we are dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), alienated from the life of God (Ephesians 4:18).

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18).

"Your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

Hell certainly is a place of total and eternal alienation from God. It is also a place of eternal torment. To imply that Hell is only separation from God means nothing to a person who never experienced fellowship with God. In fact, that sounds like good news to people who want nothing to do with God.

Sin also *breaks* fellowship with God; and if that fellowship is not restored, the soul will become alienated from God. Samson did not realize that the Lord had departed from him (Judges 16:20). Samson trifled with his relationship with God and paid a heavy price for it. Whether under the Law or under grace, no one can live with a broken relationship with God here in this life and then have an eternal relationship with Him hereafter.

"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:6). These words were written to believers.

Sin results also in alienation from others: spouse, parents, children, family,

church, friends, associates. The whole range of human relationships can be broken by sin.

And, of course, sin results in the alienation of the sinner from himself by the inner war being constantly waged by his passions against his reason. This is the plight of the "wretched man" of Romans, chapter seven.

Illness.

Sin often results in physical illness and disease. Dissipation takes its toll: drugs, tobacco, alcohol—the whole irrational lifestyle of partying and indulgence.

Much of the mental, emotional, and even physical illness that devastates so many is the result of sin. Sin is unhealthy, to say the least. By contrast, a biblical lifestyle is a healthy lifestyle.

Frustration, Boredom, Despair.

Because feeding one's indulgences only strengthens them and increases their demands, more and more is required to gratify them. Pleasures become commonplace. People get bored and want something more, something new, something with a bigger "charge" to it.

Frustration sets in. Some of this frustration happens because people cannot get what they want. Frustrated self-indulgence can break out in violence. James 4:1-3 says, "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."

Some of sinners' frustration is due to God's opposition to their selfishness. God cannot bless people in their rebellion and their determination to self-destruct. God loves them too much for that. So, when people set themselves against God, they should not be surprised when God resists them. God will work to frustrate their selfish plans and efforts. The sinner is "hell-bent" on the road to ruin, and an offended yet loving God is placing roadblocks in front of him. The stubborn soul keeps crashing through them. The Holy Spirit, "the arresting officer of heaven," lays "spike strips" across his lane, but he hits them and keeps on going.

Do not declare war on God; you cannot win. The person who joins Satan's rebellion is doomed to frustration, failure, and ultimate despair.

"The way of transgressors is hard" (Proverbs 13:15).

Abandonment To Sin.

As long as a person is alive and capable of making moral choices, the door of

salvation remains open to him or her. As the saying goes, "Where there is life, there is hope." The Holy Spirit is faithful to convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment (John 16:8). Nevertheless, God does not deal with sinners forever. In some cases the time comes when God withdraws His Spirit from an individual and abandons the soul to its sins and its fate. From that point on continued persuasion is futile and therefore no longer a virtue. Deeply grieved, the Holy Spirit withdraws. The Holy Spirit has been faithfully "telephoning" the person for a long, long time; but if the person persists in refusing to answer "ring after ring," eventually the Holy Spirit "hangs up" on that person. Yes, the person can still be saved by repentance and faith in Christ; but if people will not do so when the Spirit is striving, what hope is there that they will do so after God leaves them alone?

At times God has "given up" entire cultures to their sins. They were determined to pursue their evil ways against all reason and revelation, and to train their children to do likewise; so God just removed all restraints and let them have what they wanted, along with the consequences.

"But My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels" (Psalm 81:11, 12).

Referring to the idolatrous, pagan world, Paul writes, "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies between themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 1:24, 25).

A note of hope is important here. Some people have despaired because they have been led to believe that they have committed "the unpardonable sin" and have been abandoned by God. If you are worried that you have "sinned away your day of grace," let me assure you that you have not. The fact that you are concerned about it is proof that you have not done so. A person who has been "abandoned by God" is completely unconcerned about it and could not care less. So, flee to Christ now and by faith rest in His mercy and grace.

Eternal Death.

Persisting in living in spiritual death will ultimately lead to eternal death, also known as "the second death." Ezekiel 18:4 states categorically that the soul that sins shall die. This cannot refer to physical death, because all human beings experience physical death. It is referring to eternal death. Listen to what the Scriptures say about eternal death, the second death:

"What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!" (Romans 6:21 NIV);

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 23);

"For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

"Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:15 NASB);

"My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19, 20 NASB);

"And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14 NASB);

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolators and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (Revelation 21:8 NIV).

This is the horrific final destiny of those who are abandoned by God. They persistently rejected God, His law, and His gospel. They successfully fought off the Holy Spirit, resisting His efforts to save them, and making themselves so obnoxious to Him that He could stand them no longer.

Jesus said, "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned." (John 15:6 NIV).

Jesus said also, "The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:49, 50).

The inspired apostle wrote that they who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Destruction does not mean annihilation or going out of existence. Destruction here means utter ruin.

The eternal ruin of one's soul is a loss beyond comprehension. Jesus said, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36, 37). Even if a person were able to achieve the full gratification of every possible selfish desire, what would that person have in the end? *Nothing*. Worse than nothing. He sold his soul for temporary selfish pleasures. Now they are gone; their memory mocks him; he has lost everything, especially his soul.

People who object to the justice of the eternal punishment of sinners do not have a right understanding of the serious nature and the criminality of sin.

Moreover, they do not have a right understanding of the serious nature and the criminality of sin because they do not have a right understanding of the person, the holiness, and the moral governance of Almighty God.

Sin is putting self first—above God, above others, above all. Inherent in that choice is the willingness to sacrifice God to self. The willingness to sacrifice God to self necessarily implies a willingness to sacrifice others also to self *if and when necessary to get what self wants*. Remember, a sinner is someone who has chosen to make the gratification of his or her desires the ultimate pursuit of life. This means that the sinner will yield to, and thus be controlled by, his or her strongest desires. The strongest desires rule the sinner, whether those desires are to kill and plunder or to enjoy the honor of being the person to find the cure for a disease. If the gratification of self is the ultimate end of pursuit, it is sin.

Of course, it is not sin to enjoy the fulfillment of some worthwhile goal so long as the motive has been the honor of God and the good of others, and not merely the gratification of self.

Also, the fact that the person has not had the means or the opportunity to achieve his or her selfish goal does not lessen the guilt of the sinner. How many "Adolf Hitlers" and "Joseph Stalins" are there who never were or never will be put in a position to become one? When a person chooses to put self-gratification first, who knows what will become that person's ruling passion? Does even the sinner himself know what he is capable of, given the right circumstances? He has already chosen to put self first in disregard for God's infinitely greater interests, well-being and happiness. How far will he go in his willingness to subordinate others *if necessary* to achieve the gratification of self? Is there any evidence in his present attitude and course of action to indicate that he would give up the pursuit of his chosen end before he destroys his family, ruins their souls as well as his own, and destroys everything that gets in his way if necessary and possible? Nothing in his present course of life indicates if and when he would turn to God and abandon his destructive ways. He might, and one hopes that he will; but while he continues in his sins, no limits to what he is capable of are in sight, except the limits of his desires and opportunities.

The Bible says, "One sinner destroys much good" (Ecclesiastes 9:18).

The Bible records an incident that illustrates this point. We read about it in 2 Kings, chapter 8. Benhadad II, the king of Syria, was ill. The prophet Elisha went to Damascus to visit him. Benhadad sent a present to Elisha by Hazael, a senior member of his court. When Elisha saw Hazael, the prophet stood staring at him for a while and then began to weep. Hazael asked him why he was weeping. Elisha replied that he knew that Hazael will become the next king of Syria. He said he knew what Hazael will do to Israel. Hazael will burn their fortified places, kill their young men with the sword, smash the little children to death, and rip open the pregnant women. Hazael replied, "How could your servant, a mere dog, accomplish such a feat?" (verse 13 NIV). Yet, that is exactly what Hazael did!

Let's imagine a private conversation between two executives at an accounting firm. The first asks the second, "Would you embezzle ten million dollars from the company if you knew you could get away with it?" The second executive thinks for a moment and then responds, "Well, yes, I would." The first man asks another question. "How about ten dollars?" The second man retorts indignantly, "What do you think I am? a thief?" The first executive replies, "We have already established that fact. Now we are merely discussing at what price you'll take the money."

Every sinner has his or her "price." As long as a person lives to gratify his or her desires, what that person is willing to do will depend on what becomes the strongest desire, the desire that overcomes all conflicting and opposing desires.

The nice, pleasant, neighborly, community-minded, hardworking "dear hearts and gentle people" who do not love and obey God have no idea what they are capable of. This includes the "nice," sweet teen-age girl who quietly says "no" to Jesus Christ as definitely and as firmly as a gangster. Both have made the same evil choice; only the ways they follow it differ.

Choosing to put self first opens all evil possibilities. The determination to do what one pleases in spite of how it hurts God and others is proof that the sinner is potentially capable of anything. The direction that selfishness takes and how far it goes depends on the form and the strength of the chosen ruling desire. No wonder it is called "total moral depravity."

The son or daughter who turns away from God even if it might send a heart-broken father or mother to an early grave has the same heart as a murderer. "I don't want to hurt you, *but ...*"

Proverbs 12:10 says, "the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel" (NIV).

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:9, 10).

To the self-righteous Pharisees Jesus said, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

In Proverbs 6:16-19 we read, "These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren."

The prophet Zechariah writes, "And let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; and do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate, says the LORD" (Zechariah 8:17).

God hates sin because it is the most destructive choice possible. If allowed to continue and grow unchecked, sin would ruin everything and everybody. Every sinner exhibits the willingness to do so if necessary. As long as the sinful choice of the heart (will) continues, so long does the guilt of the sinner continue; and so long as the guilt of the sinner continues, so long must the punishment continue. Unless the person repents, all three will continue forever.

Sin is a crime of such magnitude that a just God cannot punish it with anything less than its guilt demands—eternal punishment.

"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 KJV).

"And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever" (Revelation 14:11).

Though it is delayed, the penalty for sin is inevitable. "Though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished" (Proverbs 16:5 KJV). "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

"Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Jesus said, "For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known" (Luke 12:2).

It was to the self-righteous, pseudo-religious Pharisees that Jesus directed His most stern rebukes. "How can you escape the damnation of hell?" He asks (Matthew 23:33).

In Romans 2:2, 3 Paul writes in the same tenor to those who judged others for committing the very sins they themselves were committing. "We know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?"

Good News!

The Old Testament ends with the words, "lest I come and strike the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:6). Thank God the Bible does not end there!

Romans 6:23 is "the great transition." It begins with the death sentence: "The wages of sin is death." It ends with the good news: "But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The good news is next!

Chapter 6

We All Need The Good News

Sometimes people need to hear the bad news before they are ready to hear and welcome the good news. Suppose a sure cure is found for a terminal illness. Who are the most excited about the news? The people who *have* the illness. A person who does not have the illness, or a person who has it but does not yet know it, will agree that it is very good news indeed—for *someone else*.

So it is with sin. People who are not keenly aware of the guilt and consequences of their own sin are usually not the ones who eagerly welcome the gospel, the "good news." Yes, many do come to Christ because of a life crisis or out of a sense of the emptiness and meaninglessness of life without God. Some come the intellectual route—they investigate the historical data, weight the claims of Jesus Christ, think things through, and come to the conclusion that the Christian faith is true. Such people are truly converted and become faithful disciples. Nevertheless, the deepest and strongest converts usually are the ones who turn to Christ out of a deep conviction of their sinfulness and guilt.

This was David's frame of mind when he wrote, "My iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me" (Psalm 38:4). The preaching of the apostles emphasized repentance from sin. Peter urged his hearers on the day of Pentecost, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins ..." (Acts 2:38).

Jesus did not say that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of its need for meaning and fulfillment or its spiritual emptiness (although He does make them aware of that). He said that the focus of the Holy Spirit work with the unconverted would be to "convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). The angel told Joseph that he was to call Mary's Son "Jesus," because "He will save His people from their sin" (Matthew 1:21).

God does use our life crises, our disillusionment, our inner emptiness and sense of the meaningless of life apart from God, our intelligence, and every other means and occasion to get our attention and turn us to Himself. Still, somewhere in the process we must face and deal with the "sin issue."

People are not desperate to be saved until they realize that they are lost. Most people in affluent societies are going through life fairly satisfied in their self-centered existence, feeling good about themselves, and enjoying the ride and "the pleasures of sin for a season." Tell them that they need Jesus, and they will ask, "why? I'm okay." They are dead in their trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), and they assume that to be the normal way to live. They are carelessly heading for judgment like the passengers on a pleasure cruise drifting toward the falls, oblivious to what lies ahead. These people will never "get saved" unless and until somehow God gets their attention and wakes them up to their sinfulness and guilt.

We must face the truth about ourselves, acknowledge that we have sinned and that our greatest and most urgent need is forgiveness and reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

A minister by the name of Ed Martin tells about a lady he met years ago in a city in West Virginia. She was well-dressed and appeared to be a person of culture and refinement. This lady came forward in a gospel meeting in response to Ed Martin's invitation to receive Jesus Christ. He took her by the hand and began to lead her in a "sinner's prayer."

"Dear Lord, I know that I am a no-good sinner. I know I can't save myself ..."

The lady never said a word. Ed looked at her and said, "Don't you want to be saved?"

She replied, "Yes, Eddie, I do want to be saved, but I'm not a sinner."

"Then you can't be saved," he said. "Jesus died only for sinners."

"But, Mr. Martin," she insisted, "I'm a *good* sinner."

"A good sinner! Lady, there are no good sinners. You will have to take your seat. God can't save you until you become conscious that you are a no-good sinner and need His forgiveness."

"But, Mr. Martin, you don't understand. I'm really not a bad sinner."

Ed Martin told her to go back and sit down. She held on to his hand with a vise-like grip. Finally, she looked him in the eyes and said, "Oh, please forgive me. I know I'm a no-good hell-deserving sinner. I am a proud, no-good sinner. I do need Christ to forgive me of my sins."

"Wonderful!" he replied. "Now, lady, you are ready to do business with God."

Chapter 7

The Ground And The Conditions Of Salvation

The difference between the ground and the conditions of anything is this: the ground is the basis, the originating and effective cause, of an action; the conditions are those things that did not bring it about, but that must be there for it to happen.

For example, suppose a man chooses to give his son a car. His son is three years old. The ground (foundation, basis) of his choice is his love for his son. The obvious conditions are: his son has to be old enough to drive, learn how to drive, and get his driver's license.

Now, his father's motive in wanting to give him a car is the ground of the action. The other considerations are the conditions; they had nothing to do with the father's motive. If the conditions were the *ground*, then they would obligate the father to give him a car when the conditions are met, whether he wanted to or not, or whether or not he promised to do so.

People commonly confuse the ground and the conditions of salvation. They fail to see the essential difference between the two.

The Ground of Salvation.

The ground (foundation, basis) of salvation is the originating cause. That one and only originating cause is *the unconditional love of God*. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." (John 3:16). In fact, God's love is the ground of everything God does or allows to be done. Nobody forces Him. Nobody obligates Him. God is love. That is the definition of His character and the motive for all of His purposes and actions.

God forgives us because He loves us. Some mistakenly assume that this is enough. They reason that if God loves us, He will forgive us in spite of everything. But if God forgave us *only* because He loves us, He would be acting recklessly. He would be like a father who gives his three-year-old son a car or a rifle only because he loves him—only far worse!

Salvation also has necessary conditions. Meeting these conditions does not earn us anything or any merit. These conditions do not obligate God to save us, *and these conditions do not save us*. Still, they have to be met before God can wisely and safely do so. The three conditions of salvation are: (1) an atonement, (2) repentance, and (3) faith. Again, none of these three conditions obligates God to save us. Christ's death on the cross did not obligate God to save us; neither do our repentance and faith obligate God to save us. Salvation is a free, unmerited act of God's mercy and grace motivated by His love.

The Conditions Of Salvation.

One condition of salvation—an atonement—only God can fulfill. We cannot save ourselves. Nothing we can do will atone for our sins.

Two conditions of salvation—repentance and faith—only we can fulfill. God will not do it for us. He will and does do everything wisely possible to bring us to repentance and faith, but He will not do it for us and He will not make us do it. *We must do it, and He commands us to do it—now!*

Sometimes the Scriptures say that faith is the single condition of salvation, and in a real sense it is. This is because genuine saving faith implies and therefore includes repentance. *When we place our faith in Christ, we turn to Christ, the object of our faith.* It is faith *toward* our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). When we turn toward one direction, we automatically turn away from the opposite direction. It is a single act.

In the following two chapters we are going to explore all three of these conditions in depth, beginning with The Atonement.

Chapter 8

The Atonement

I have written on The Atonement at least three times. It All Adds Up To Love; What You Should Know About Jesus Christ; and I Will Lift Up My Eyes (Dan Johnson, editor)—all contain a chapter on this great redeeming act of God in Jesus Christ. All cover the main theme and parallel each other in general. "The Meaning Of The Passion Of Christ" is also a separate article on the internet at www.jwjepson.com in the Treasury Of Faith section. For our purpose here I have chosen to use the chapter in I Will Lift Up My Eyes, with pertinent revisions and expansions. At the beginning, it will cover some of the things we have already explored; then it will go on into the heart of this challenging and inspiring truth.

"Atonement" is not the best word for the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Strictly speaking, "atonement" is an Old Testament provision expressed in the Hebrew word, *kaphar*, meaning "to cover." The sacrifices under the Old Covenant "covered" sin temporarily. Only the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross could actually *remove* sin. The sins of Old Testament believers were "covered" by the sacrifices. The believers were saved "on credit." Their faith in God's temporary provision under the Law was counted as faith in God's permanent provision in Christ.

The New Testament provision is not the "covering" of sin, but the *removal* of sin. In the New Testament the word "atonement" is found only in the King James Version of Romans 5:11. Even there the original word means "reconciliation."

In word and in song we often hear that the blood of Christ "covers" our sins, that our sins are "under the blood," or that God "sees our sins through the blood of Christ." We understand what people mean in principle by these statements; however, they are not strictly correct. The blood of Jesus Christ does not "camouflage" our sins; it removes them entirely—blots them out, washes them away.

Also, though it is appropriate and is used in Acts 1:3 in regard to the suffering Jesus endured, "passion" does not describe the full meaning of Christ's redemptive sacrifice on the cross. Jesus did suffer physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually; and that suffering was a part of the great redemptive drama. However, it was Christ's *death* that accomplished the redemptive condition for our salvation. If Jesus Christ had suffered everything and yet had not *died* for us, we still would have no savior.

Focusing on the suffering and the wounds of Christ is a devotional exercise; however, it can take our focus away from the actual redemptive event itself—His vicarious death. So, when speaking of the "passion" of Christ, we mean the entire, completed redemptive act, culminating in Christ's death.

We must understand also that Christ's vicarious death involved the "shedding"—the pouring out—of His blood. His was a complete sacrifice. Sometimes it is said, "All it took was one drop of Jesus' blood to wash away my sins." If that were so, the blood He lost prior to His actual death would have been sufficient. It was the *pouring out* of His blood in death that completed the redemptive prerequisite for our salvation.

This leads to a very important understanding. The only sins that Christ's sacrificial death actually forgave (secured the immediate forgiveness of) at the time were the sins of past believers and the past sins of the believers then present. His death did not automatically forgive anyone's future sins or the sins of anyone in the future. Christ's death *provided* forgiveness for everyone; it becomes effective only for those who believe *when they believe*.

For that reason we must not think and speak of Christ's redemptive act in terms of a financial transaction. It is popular to say that Jesus "paid" our debt. Redemption does indeed include release from the power of our sin and also release from our legal obligation to the penalty of our sin under the moral law. Nevertheless, if Jesus literally "paid the debt," all our past, present, and future sins were already forgiven before we were converted, and *even before we were born*. In that case, we would not need to repent and put our faith in Christ. All of our sins would have been forgiven already and automatically.

If you owe money on an account somewhere, and someone comes in and pays it off in full, you do not have to do anything. You do not have to believe it, accept it, or even know about it. You might, but it would not be necessary.

Understanding this will keep us from error. Christ's death did not automatically save and forgive all the future sins of the "elect," allowing them to sin with impunity. We are clearly told in 1 John 1:7 that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin only if "we walk in the light, as He is in the light." "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" if we confess them (verse 9).

Understanding this will also keep us from another error called "universalism." Universalism teaches that *everyone* will be saved. Both this error and the one just mentioned emerge out of the misconception that Christ's death actually and automatically "saved" us and forgave our sins ahead of time. The first error holds that Christ died only for the elect and thus forgave their sins ahead of time. Because it is easy to demonstrate from the Scriptures that Christ died for all, the other error concludes that Christ forgave everyone's sins automatically and all at one time.

A clergyman said to me once, "On the cross Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' That took care of it."

Nonsense!

Again, Christ's death on the cross *provided* full and free salvation for everyone; it becomes effective for the individual person only when that person

repents and puts his or her faith in Him and His completed redemptive work.

A wrong view of God leads to a wrong view of sin; and a wrong view of sin leads to a wrong view of Christ's death on the cross.

The Meaning Of The Passion Of Christ.

A red traffic light means stop, and most of us are careful not to run through it. We might kill somebody or get killed ourselves. Also, that traffic signal has a penalty behind it, and it is the penalty that makes it a law. Without a penalty that stop light would be only very good advice. But because it is backed up by a penalty, people take it seriously. People pay more attention to penalties than to advice. Also, the greater the penalty, the more seriously they regard the law.

Now, God is not dealing with minor infractions. Planet Earth is in open mutiny. God is dealing with open, total rebellion in the human heart.

The fact of sin needs no proof. A drowning man needs no proof of the existence of water. He is surrounded by it and it is fast choking the life out of him. So it is with sin. It is everywhere, and billions of people are "drowning" in it.

If a person sins only three sins a day (and some people sin three sins in three minutes!), at the end of fifty years of sinning there would be against that person's record in the court of Heaven no fewer than 54,787 sins!

Who can truthfully say "I have *never* sinned?" None! All of us have sinned (Romans 3:23), and this fact alone completely cuts the ground from under all self-righteousness. We have all sinned, and the soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4). That is why the law cannot justify us. The only way a person can be justified by the law is never to break the law. Once a person breaks the law, the law can only condemn. The broken law demands the penalty. Justice demands that God impose the penalty for sin, and this He will do because He is just. God must because God is just.

Nothing is nearly as destructive as sin. The whole creation must be protected against it at all costs. The moral law, supported by the most horrific penalty possible, stands as the universal bulwark against sin.

Yes, God has a world of guilty sinners on His hands; and as the moral Governor of the universe He is obligated to uphold moral law and moral order. That means the execution of the penalty on those who have broken the moral law. And that includes all of us.

But God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). God wants to forgive if possible, not punish.

So here is the problem. How can God exercise mercy safely? Forgiving sin is the most dangerous thing God can do. It means setting aside the penalty for someone who has broken the universal moral law. The most terrible penalty

possible has not prevented people from sinning. Now, should God remove even that deterrent? It would be wrong for Him to do so. If even one person can deliberately choose to disobey, and get by with it, the integrity of moral law is violated. God cannot remove the penalty without acting in reckless disregard for the well-being of the entire universe of moral beings.

If God is going to forgive sin—that is, set aside the penalty for someone who has sinned—something must be put in the place of the penalty that will do what the penalty is intended to do. It must say to all, once and for all, that mercy must not be misunderstood as laxity.

If God is going to forgive sin and still be just, something must be done so the offer of mercy and forgiveness will not lead people to think, "That was easy. God must not be serious about sin after all."

Well, what can that be? Repentance?

Repentance is a necessary condition of forgiveness. Unless we repent, we cannot be forgiven. Jesus said, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5).

Yet, repentance alone is not enough. It is too easy in the sense that it promotes the "I-can-do-it-myself-whenever-I-get-ready" notion. No, our repentance alone will not save us. We have sinned against the holy Lord God of the universe, and only He can forgive us.

Then, why doesn't God just go ahead and forgive everybody? Because God is no fool. We would not respect Him if He did, just as we would not respect a judge or a governor who opened all the prisons and released all the inmates.

Either the guilty must suffer the penalty or someone who is innocent must suffer and die in the place and on behalf of the guilty. The innocent substitute cannot be *punished* because it is impossible to punish someone who is innocent. Nevertheless, someone who is innocent can voluntarily *suffer* in the place and on the behalf of the guilty.

Hebrews 9:22 says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. God kept this fact before ancient Israel continually. There were morning sacrifices, evening sacrifices, sin offerings—all intended to demonstrate that the only way sinful human beings can approach a holy God is on the condition that the person's sin has been atoned for (covered) by the substitution of the sufferings and death of an innocent being. When the guilty person saw the innocent animal suffering and dying in his place, he knew that his sin caused that suffering and death. That poor animal was bearing what he himself deserved to bear. It showed him that sin results in death, and the animal was dying in his place.

Yet, "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4).

Why?

Because the sufferings and death of an animal could not and did not have the necessary moral force to be an adequate preventive of sin and therefore atone for sin. Seeing an animal bearing our sins and suffering and dying in our place is not enough to cause us to hate our sins and turn us to God. The sufferings and death of animals could not satisfy the moral requirements of public justice. They cannot satisfy the demands of the broken moral law. Thus they cannot fulfill the necessary condition for us to be forgiven.

Who, then, can make such a sacrifice on behalf of sinners?

Another mere human being cannot do it. For one thing, all of us have sinned. We would have to suffer the penalty for our own sins, and so we could not do it for someone else.

Shall an angel come from heaven and become the sacrifice? No, because even the sufferings and death of an angel on our behalf (were that even possible) would not have sufficient influence to break the power of sin in our hearts and lives, and thus be an effective preventive of sin. For that reason they could not satisfy the demands of the broken moral law.

Humanity has sinned, and humanity is accountable. Man must bear the penalty.

Who, then, can make the required sacrifice? Who can be our substitute? Who can take our place and satisfy the demands of the moral law, that we have broken? Who can make a sacrifice of such magnitude and influence that, once it is clearly seen and understood, will do what even the penalty itself has not done? Who can take our place and redeem us from our sin and its horrific consequences?

It must be someone who is innocent, someone therefore who can take the place of the guilty and bear the sins of the guilty, demonstrating to all that the exercise of mercy does not compromise the moral law. Mercy is free, but it is not cheap; it will cost the innocent substitute everything.

It would have to be someone of the highest status, position, and authority, because his sufferings and death would have to have the utmost universal influence. When people truly understood what he had done for them, it would have to affect them deeply and powerfully enough to turn their hearts to God and break the power of sin in their lives and cause them to forsake it totally. They would have to see that their only hope of forgiveness and salvation is to place their trust exclusively and entirely in the substitute who died under their sins. Only then would it satisfy public justice and make forgiveness morally possible.

It would have to be someone who would do it solely out of supreme love, because he certainly would not owe it to us.

But who can do this? *Who would* do this?

There is only one—*God Himself!*

But how can God do that? God is God, and not man. How can He be a substitute for us?

But, look? Who is this leaving the throne of eternal majesty, laying aside His divine prerogatives, taking on Himself full humanity, entering and developing in the womb of a virgin named Mary, and then as a new-born baby lying in a manger as the angels watched in wonder? It is God Almighty in the Second Person of His eternal Trinity. His name is JESUS! God took upon Himself human flesh. He became one of us to save us.

John the Baptist announced Him; "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29). This must have amazed John's hearers. They were familiar with sacrifices that atoned for sin, sacrifices that had to be repeated regularly. Wasn't God's "lamb" the one they sacrificed in obedience to the Law of Moses? In effect, John is saying, "No! Here is God's *real* Lamb!" Also, they knew of sacrifices for their nation. John is announcing that God's Lamb, Jesus, is able to take away the sins of the whole world!

The scene changes. We come now to Calvary. The sight shocks us. Jesus is hanging on a Roman cross. We stare at the blood that gushes from His wounds. We remember what God said in Leviticus 17:11, "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul." The truth hits us like a sledgehammer—that is the life-blood of the Son of God being poured out for our sins!

So then, how great is the guilt of sin? How great is God's commitment to provide the one and only way to forgive our sin without doing immeasurable harm by destroying respect for the moral law? How great is God's love, grace, and mercy? LOOK AT OUR SUFFERING, DYING SUBSTITUTE!

It is the spectacle of the ages. The great offended Lawgiver once and for all upholding the honor and integrity of the moral law by personally suffering under its penalty on behalf of us who violated it. He fully satisfied the requirements of Divine justice that would make mercy possible. If the offender ever thought that his or her sins were not so bad after all, that God is not really serious in His pronouncements against evil—all he or she has to do is to look at the suffering, dying Savior for a correct view of the matter. We look and see our Substitute dying in agony and blood, and immediately we realize "*that* suffering, *that* death is because of *my* sins; it cost God everything so I could be forgiven."

With one last heave of His holy soul, our Savior cries out, "It is finished!" He dies under the burden of our sins. He bridges the unbridgeable chasm between God and man, and brings us together.

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). In Christ God *does* provide and offer salvation to the whole world; yet only those who will repent and believe will receive it.

In the death of Christ on the cross, God shows us several things.

He shows us how valuable we are. We are created in His own image and capable of endless joy or misery.

He shows us how much He loves us. Remember, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

He shows us the seriousness and the wickedness of our sins. He shows us how much we hurt Him by our pride, rebellion, and blasphemy; by the way we have ignored, rejected, and abused Him in our cruel selfishness. It shows us the guilt of how we have treated others in our selfishness.

We see God's determination to forgive us only on conditions that would satisfy the demands of the moral law and effectively break the power of sin in our hearts and lives.

If the sight of Almighty God, our Creator and lawful Sovereign, taking on Himself full humanity to die in agony and blood on an old rugged cross under the burden of our sins, and knowing that our vile sins help nail Him there—if that does not break our stubborn hearts, make us love God and hate sin, then nothing will!

Now we see our sin in all of its ugly reality. How detestable, how repulsive it is! Temptations lose their power in the presence of nail-scarred hands. How can we even think of holding on to or going back to the sins that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross? How can anything that hurts Jesus have any appeal to us? We would rather die than hurt Jesus!

A hymn by Charles Wesley asks, “And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior’s blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain, for me who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, my God, should die for me!”

Isaac Watts expressed it so powerfully in one of his hymns:

"When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

"Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charmed me most
I sacrifice them to His blood.

"See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all."

When we hold the communion bread and cup, we are saying to all mankind:
"*This is what motivates me; this is why I love and follow Jesus Christ! He died for me; I live for Him!*"

Now God can forgive us! Christ died *for* us.

"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;
the chastisement for our peace was upon Him; and by His stripes we are healed"
(Isaiah 53:5).

"Now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the
sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

"Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He
might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18 NASB).

Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present
evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4).

Jesus Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every
lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good
works" (Titus 2:14).

"He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but
for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Paul declared, "God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of our Lord
Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I go the world"
(Galatians 6:14).

"Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered
the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the
blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean,
sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ,

who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:12-14).

After he realized what he had done, Judas Iscariot sank into despair. "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" he cried (Matthew 27:4).

The word of God warns us: "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:29).

We go once more to Calvary. You are standing at the foot of the cross. Jesus is dying. The guilt of your sins is pressing down upon Him. Suddenly, the Savior looks up. His eyes meet yours. He calls you by name. He says, "I am doing this for you—*because I love you.*"

Can you turn around, walk away, and go on living the life and doing the things that nailed Him there?

Doesn't everything in you move you to fall on your knees and cry out, "My Lord and my God! I didn't know you love me this much! I'm through with sin! Forgive me. Jesus, I give myself to You. I believe You! You are my Savior and my Lord! I love You and I will live for You forever!"

Come. He is waiting for you.

Chapter 9

Repentance And Faith

God has provided everything for our salvation. Our obligation is to repent and believe the good news. Repentance and faith go together like the two sides of a coin. They are two dimensions of the same act of the will.

By repenting and believing, we are not helping God save us. Also, our repentance and faith do not mean that salvation is part God's work and part ours. Salvation is *all* of God. It is a free gift, provided through Jesus Christ. It is up to us to turn to God and receive it. God commands us to repent and believe the gospel, and He is doing everything wisely possible to persuade us to do so.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to reprove and convict us of sin and call us to Christ (John 16:8). The Church joins the Holy Spirit in this divine call. "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come'" (Revelation 22:17). The "bride" is the Church.

Repentance.

Conviction of sin; confession of sin; repentance of sin. They all go together.

Conviction itself is not repentance. Although conviction of sin should move us to repentance, it does not always do so. Many sinners are convicted of their sins who refuse to repent of their sins.

In Acts 24:25 we read that when the apostle Paul reasoned with Felix, the Roman governor, about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix trembled. Instead of repenting, he dismissed Paul with the comment that when he had a convenient time, he would send for him. There is no record that he ever repented. He brushed aside his golden moment of opportunity.

Many have come under such powerful conviction of sin that they have gripped the back of the pew in front of them in church until their knuckles turned white, only to walk away unrepentant.

On the other hand, some become convicted of sin to the point of despair. They are convicted but never embrace the free gift of salvation. The contrast between Judas Iscariot (Matthew 25:7) and Peter (Matthew 26:75) was this: Judas despaired and hanged himself; Peter repented, believed, and was forgiven.

Remorse is a sense of anguish caused by a sense of guilt. Remorse also should move people to repentance and faith; however, remorse itself is not repentance.

Confession of sin expresses repentance; however, confession of sin is not the same as repentance. Many people confess their sins who do not forsake their

sins. Mercy is promised to those who forsake their sins as well as confess them (Proverbs 28:13).

Honest confession of sin accompanies genuine repentance. King David confessed his adultery and murder (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51:3). The prodigal son confessed to his father, "I have sinned" (Luke 15:18). The dishonest tax collector prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13).

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). This kind of honest confession of sin assumes honest repentance of sin.

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

Repentance is turning away from sin *by turning to God*. In fact, turning *to God* is the only way a person can turn *from sin*, just as turning toward one direction is the only way to turn away from the opposite direction. We cannot face opposite directions at the same time; we cannot go in opposite directions at the same time; we cannot serve two masters at the same time (Matthew 6:24).

There are no half-way Christians. Partial repentance is impossible. People who give up one sin or a few sins without giving up *sin* are merely rearranging their sins, making "trade-offs," and bargaining with God. Such behavioral changes are ultimately motivated by self-interest and not by real love for God and others. This is true even when the changes benefit others or are said to be made for the benefit of others. The sinner might make the changes so he can "live with himself," or to gratify a "sense of duty," without truly turning to God from sin *per se*.

The story is told of a man who stole \$100.00. In the days following his theft, his conscience gave him no rest. He was unable to sleep at night. So he wrote an anonymous letter to the person from whom he stole the money. "Dear Sir: I stole \$100.00 from you last week. I haven't been able to sleep since. Here is \$50.00. If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the other \$50.00."

Real repentance comes from godly sorrow for sin. "For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Godly sorrow for sin is realizing how our sins have hurt God and grieving over the pain we have caused Him.

The person who whole-heartedly repents and fully trusts Jesus Christ for salvation has realized the holiness of God and the sinfulness and guilt of his or her own sin. That person can sing with deep sincerity,

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I'm found;
was blind, but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed."

Faith.

Most of the "religion" in the world consists of human efforts to achieve the benefits and attain the goals of the religion. Mankind loves "do-it-yourself" religion or "spirituality." We want to feel that we have saved ourselves. We hate to give up the carrot-and-stick delusion that if we just do all the right things, perform the right rituals, make the right sacrifices, pile up enough good works to out-weigh the bad, and gain enough credits, we will be acceptable to God. The name for that error is *autosoterism*—"self-salvation." It is the "Little Jack Horner" mind-set: "what a good boy am I." Salvation is not the result of what *we* do; it is the result of what *God* has done.

Another notion that has become widespread and deeply ingrained for centuries is that Christ and the "saints" have provided a huge reservoir of surplus merit. This surplus merit is available to us to compensate for our moral deficiencies (sins). This supposed surplus of merit has been created by what are called "works of supererogation," righteous acts of Christ and the saints beyond what they were required to do. The way we are told to receive this merit is through the sacraments, particularly through the Eucharist (communion). This is another "salvation by works" scheme, only this one emphasizes the works of others instead of our own.

One clergyman said that, although he would not do so, if he gave the communion elements to a dog, the "grace of God" would be in that dog.

Silly Neoplatonism. "Free Jerusalem from Athens and the church of Christ from the Academy of Plato!" (Tertullian, ca. AD 155 - 222).

The Eucharist is not "a dose of salvation." Grace is a choice, not a mystical "thing" or essence that we swallow. Grace is God's act of granting unmerited favor to us.

"Sacerdotal sacramentalism"—dispensing "grace" through a priesthood—overlooks the fact that so-called "works of supererogation" are impossible. It is impossible to store up surplus moral merit. Jesus said the first and great commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12:30). *This is not an ideal; it is the starting point, the foundation, the sum, the essence of all religion and morality.* Everyone is obligated to do this. We must do no less; we can do no more. Jesus and the "saints" did no more than what they were morally obligated to do. Jesus is the only one who did so perfectly. All

the rest have sinned; no-one has a "surplus of merit." We are justified only by grace through faith.

We are not made righteous by the righteous life Jesus lived. We are made righteous by faith in His shed blood. That is how we "eat the flesh of the Son of God and drink His blood" (John 6:53). It is appropriating to ourselves by faith the results of His death, and entering into a living relationship with Him. Without that living relationship we have no life in us, as Jesus said.

When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, God does not impute (count, credit) Christ's righteousness to us. In justifying the believer by faith, God does indeed impute (count, credit) to the believer a fully righteous standing before Him (Romans 8:23, 24; 2 Corinthians 5:21). This is a direct act of God in clearing our record of all sin. It is *not* crediting *Christ's* righteousness (moral merits) to us. If God credited Christ's righteousness to us, it would mean that Jesus obeyed God more than necessary and God gave His surplus "righteousness" (merits) to us. It would also mean that we are saved and declared righteous by Christ's righteous life, not by faith in His death on the cross. That would make His death superfluous.

Now that Christ is raised from the dead and glorified at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest, we are indeed "saved by His life" (Romans 5:10); this *follows* reconciliation and sustains us in our salvation. Christ is indeed our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30), because without His death, resurrection, and intercession we would have no righteous standing before God and no victory over sin. Jesus Christ died and rose again to save us from the *guilt* and the *penalty* of sin. He lives to save us from the *power* and the *practice* of sin. When He returns, He will save us from the *presence* of sin.

Because wrong ideas about salvation are so pervasive, it is necessary to address them and deal with them. From here on we will give our attention to the only true way of salvation—justification by faith.

Although repentance is a necessary condition of salvation, faith is often spoken of in the Scriptures as the *only* condition. We are saved by faith alone. The reason for this is that saving faith presupposes and includes repentance. One can have repentance without faith in Christ—and get nowhere. One cannot have real saving faith without repentance. Any such "faith" is dead (James 2:17).

Good works do not merit salvation. The godly works of a person who is saved by grace through faith *validate* that person's faith. They demonstrate the genuineness of the person's faith. Paul preached that people "should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting [consistent with] repentance" (Acts 26:20). Paul and James are in agreement on the relationship between faith and works.

Faith is an act of the will. It is the heart (will) receiving, believing and obeying God and the truth. Faith is a whole-hearted commitment to God and the truth. In salvation the heart (will) fully embraces the Object of faith—*Christ*. When we put our faith in Christ, we turn *to* Him; in turning *to* Him, we turn away *from* sin. Do

you want to turn away from sin? Turn to Christ. It's that simple.

The Funk And Wagnalls Dictionary defines faith as follows. "Faith is a union of belief and trust ... as soon as a belief is strong enough to be followed by definite action, the belief becomes faith."

Faith is a choice. There is a kind of faith that is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to some believers (1 Corinthians 12:9). That is not saving faith. Saving faith is our response to God's grace. God does not do it for us. It is not some kind of divine enablement. We *can* repent and believe; if we could not, God would not have commanded us to do so. When Jesus said to the people, "Repent, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15), our Lord assumed that they had the ability and therefore the obligation to do so.

Ephesians 2:8 and 9 reads: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Some take this to mean that saving faith is the gift of God. But in this passage, "it" is neuter; both "faith" and "grace" are feminine. So, the "gift of God" in this passage refers to salvation, not to "grace" or "faith." We have been saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Our will reaches out and receives this gift. God and others lead us to this decision; however, the decision is ours.

Faith is based on the truth. Genuine faith is not "blind faith." It is reasonable; it fixes on the facts—what is real, factual, historical, testable, reliable, true. It is open to honest examination.

Although faith is not contrary to reason, it goes beyond reason. Reason goes only so far. Given the solid foundation on which the Christian faith is built, the faith that goes beyond reason is most reasonable; it is the faith that reason and the facts require.

Faith rests on God's self-revelation. The truth determines faith, not vice versa. Truth—real, objective truth—is always the foundation of—and essential to—real faith. Without real, objective truth, "faith" is only superstition.

So then, our obligation is to receive and act upon "the *testimony* of God, that has been *authenticated* by God." If God is true, His word is true; it is the foundation and the final authority of our faith and therefore of our commitment. Jesus said that the Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35).

Our faith is not in human wisdom but in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5). In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul states that our faith is validated by the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without the resurrection of Christ our faith would be devoid of truth, a hoax, and we would be still in our sins (verse 17). The good news is that Jesus *did* rise from the dead in time/space history. He is alive!

Faith is a decision. It involves the commitment of the will to the truth. Faith is choosing according to the truth. It is setting the direction of one's being, lining

ourselves up with the truth. The result is a lifestyle conformed to the truth. Faith results in faithfulness. Believing and living are inseparable; if we really believe the truth, we will obey it and live it.

Paul said that he lived by the faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20). "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17 plus three other passages).

Romans 14:23 says that whatever is not of faith is sin. It goes against what one believes; it is a violation of one's principles, conscience, and moral integrity. That is why unbelief always implies disobedience. Unbelief is a selfish decision to act and live contrary to known truth. Unbelief shuts God out.

We cannot be saved by our own works, by anything that we can do; our sins have already eliminated that possibility. The person who would plead his own goodness before God is out of his or her mind.

Christ is the only way to God. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). People who object to this as narrow-minded bigotry, who think there are other ways to God, have not thought the matter through. If God could justly forgive us any other way, He would not have sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us on the cross. It is irrational to think that the Son of God would have given Himself to bleed and die on the cross if there are other ways to reconcile us to God. Jesus Christ is the only One who made the forgiveness of our sins morally and governmentally possible.

Christ is our only hope, our only Savior. He is the only Object of saving faith—*nothing else*. It is Christ alone, Christ plus nothing, Christ completely, Christ all-sufficient. Saving faith is resting entirely on the completed work of Christ for salvation.

Saving faith is more than an opinion, more than passive agreement, more than mere mental assent. As we have seen, faith is a moral dynamic, a commitment of the will and thus of the whole being to Christ. Saving faith is believing with all the heart.

Saving faith is a definite act. We cannot span a chasm in two jumps. We might be led through a process of teaching, enlightenment, and conviction; however, the experience of salvation itself requires an act of the will. It is the point where we give ourselves up, commit ourselves to Christ, and receive Him into our hearts and lives. The journey from death to life is one step. Faith is a very simple yet profound act.

Jesus said, "He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24). "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).

What does real, saving faith do? (1) Saving faith purifies the heart (Acts

15:9). (2) Saving faith works by love (Galatians 5:6). We are saved by faith alone, apart from works; *but we are not saved by a "faith" that won't work*. Motivated by love, our faith puts us into action. (3) Saving faith overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). This is the faith that saves; nothing else is.

Here is further testimony from The Scriptures.

"But as many as received Him [Christ], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:14-16).

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

"To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:42).

"[B]y Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39).

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

"For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation (Romans 10:10).

Influences.

If people were willing to love and obey God, it would be easy to bring them to faith in Christ. As it is, the effort to convert sinners generally encounters stiff resistance, often downright belligerence. The proud, unreasonable commitment to self and self-gratification is so strong that huge resources, Divine and human, have always been committed to the herculean task of saving souls. These resources are of two kinds: (1) personal agents and (2) instrumental means.

First and foremost among the personal agents involved in converting people is the Holy Spirit. No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him or her (John 6:44). It is a moral impossibility, not a natural impossibility. They cannot because they will not.

So the Father sent the Holy Spirit to draw people to Christ. The Holy Spirit does not move the human will by force. His influence is moral, persuasive. He seeks to turn the heart by the truth. He combines infinite values, eternal considerations, powerful motives, and thrusts the full weight of their logic on the reason. Truth floods the sinner's mind in a mighty effort to turn the soul to God. Now, what the soul does with the Spirit's gracious influence is its own choice.

The Holy Spirit is giving Himself to the thankless task of winning people from self-destruction. But so long as they hold on to their selfishness, their pride, their self-indulgences, they frustrate Him and make their own salvation impossible. *People cannot be born of the Spirit while they continue to resist the Spirit.*

And how do people resist the Holy Spirit? By resisting the truth as He presents it to the mind; by putting off obedience; by diverting one's attention to something else; by embracing error—by any action other than honest, immediate surrender to God and faith in Christ.

Genesis 6:3 says that God's Spirit will not always strive with man. What will resisting the Holy Spirit lead to? What are its consequences? Jesus said that if the light that is in us is darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 6:23).

As the Holy Spirit is grieved, the heart grows cold and hard. Interest in the gospel wanes. The heart becomes unaffected by its presentation. Light resisted becomes dim. Truth no longer affects the soul. The mind becomes settled in error and self-delusion.

Look at that precious soul! All heaven is filled with anxiety over him, and yet he trifles. Against the opposition of the Holy Spirit and his own reason he stubbornly rejects the Savior. He dashes recklessly on, crashing every roadblock the Spirit of God throws in his path. Once the siren of conscience shattered his complacency as he raced down the broad way to destruction, but now it is almost silent. There he stands on the precipice. The Holy Spirit makes one last desperate effort to save him, but he wrenches himself loose from the Spirit's restraining grasp and plunges himself into outer darkness! The sight is unbearable. Heaven groans in grief.

Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus one night. The Lord flatly told him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:5-8).

We do not see the wind, but we witness the effects of its power. Just so, we do not see the Holy Spirit, but we observe the results of His influences on the human mind and soul. He urges the sinner to repent, trust Christ, and live for God. When the heart yields, the person is changed—born of the Spirit.

Believers are also personal agents who are involved in the great evangelistic mission. Christ sent His Church into all the world to preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16). And so, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" (Revelation 22:17). The "bride" is the Church.

The apostle Paul reminded the church at Corinth, "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15 KJV). Paul worked with the Holy Spirit in bringing them to the new birth.

God saves people by means of the truth. The primary *instrument* God uses to do this is His word, the Bible. The word of God is "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17).

"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth" (James 1:18 NIV). Verse 21 says, "[H]umbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you" (NIV).

The apostle Peter states that we are "born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23). Jesus said that the "seed" is the word of God (Luke 8:11).

God also uses the convergence of providential circumstances to wake up some people and prepare their heart and mind to receive Christ and be saved. Many are the times people under the Holy Spirit's conviction have had a close brush with tragedy, and have realized that through that experience God was speaking to them. Others have experienced some gracious favor from God before they were even saved, and that helped to bring them to faith in their gracious Savior.

Romans 2:4 says that the goodness of God leads us to repentance.

Chapter 10

Such A Great Salvation

A number of years ago a PBS crew did a documentary on an evangelical church. They filmed parts of the services, including clips of the singing and preaching. They covered the ministries of the church and interviewed some of the people. During one conversation the interviewer asked one of the leaders of the church, "What does it mean to be 'saved'?"

Evidently flustered by the pressure of the moment, the man was at a loss for an answer. Of course, that embarrassing moment was included in the final production.

Did the interviewer put that same question to others in the church before he got the confused response he wanted? We wonder.

So, just what *does* it mean to be saved? What *is* salvation? Hebrews 2:3 calls it "such a great salvation" (NIV), and urges us not to neglect it. Certainly it *is* a great salvation, as we shall see when we consider its nature and its results.

In 1 Corinthians 6:11 we find one of the definitions of salvation. After describing some of the sinful practices of unbelievers, the apostle says to the believers, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

In his second inspired letter to the Corinthians Paul declares, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Being saved is being reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ, accompanied by a total transformation of heart and life.

Forgiveness.

Salvation includes the forgiveness of all one's past sins. The pardon is full and free. The believer is redeemed (rescued, set free) from his/her sins. Ephesians 1:7 equates redemption with the forgiveness of sins. Speaking of Christ, it says, "In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

Colossians is the companion epistle of Ephesians. In Colossians 1:14 the apostle again equates redemption with the forgiveness of sins. Speaking of Jesus Christ, he says, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psalm 32:1, 2).

"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Colossians 2:13).

"Not by the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:12-14).

"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (1 John 2:12).

"[Y]ou were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (Hebrews 1:18, 19).

"And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth' (Revelation 5:9, 10).

Remember, in salvation our sins are not "covered." That was what the sacrifices did under the Old Covenant. Under the New Covenant the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7-10). Our sins are blotted out, washed away. Christ "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Revelation 1:5).

Justification.

Salvation goes beyond forgiveness. A person who is forgiven still has the offense on his or her record, even though the penalty has been removed. Justification means that God treats the believer in Christ as though he or she had never sinned in the first place. Believers are not pardoned sinners; we are justified saints. In Christ, God has given us a new record of our past. He

imputes righteousness to us—"places it to our account (*logidzomai*)."
We stand righteous before God by faith.

Christ was "betrayed and put to death because of our misdeeds and was raised to secure our justification" (Romans 4:25 Amplified Version).

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

Always keep in mind that we are justified *from* our sins, not *in* our sins. A justified person has been set free from sin to live a justified life.

This is an appropriate place to consider the meaning of water baptism. Water baptism is not part of the saving act itself. The saving act itself is the act of God in justifying the new believer by grace through faith. Nevertheless, water baptism is part of the total salvation *experience*. Water baptism is intended to be the justified believer's first response to God's saving act. It is "the answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21). "Answer" means "appeal, response, pledge."

Conversion And Regeneration.

It is common to make a definite distinction between conversion and regeneration. This is due to the notion that "regeneration" is an unconscious, amoral, so-called "spiritual" change of the metaphysical essence of the human spirit. This is an example of the influence of Greek philosophy on Christian theology.

To support this notion an appeal is made to Ephesians 2:3, which says that we were "by nature children of wrath." It is claimed that "nature" (*phusis* or *physis*) in this verse means our very essence. If that were true, 2 Peter 1:4 would teach that believers are going to become God, because we are to be "partakers of the divine nature [*phusis*]." In fact, that is the long-standing doctrine of "Theosis," held and taught by many, even though the passage in 2 Peter is clearly referring to being conformed to God's moral nature (character) through the "exceedingly great and precious promises" that He has given to believers.

The apostle Paul affirmed this earlier in 2 Corinthians 6:16 - 7:1. Because believers have the promises stated in chapter 6:16 - 18, he urges us, "Let us cleanse ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Therefore, when Ephesians 2:3 says that before salvation we were children of wrath, it is referring to our cultural and ethnic background, and our resulting spiritual and moral condition, including its habitual sinful practices. We did what

came naturally in the accepted mores of our culture. God's wrath is upon the sinful hearts and lifestyle of sinners, not the essence of their being.

So then, regeneration is not a change in the essence of our being or any part of it. Regeneration is a moral and relational transformation, a new birth, as Nicodemus should have known. Our Lord said to him bluntly: "You must be born again" (John 3:7). When Nicodemus became confused because he thought in terms of the physical instead of the spiritual, moral, and relational, Jesus asked him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (John 3:10). Nicodemus should have understood the new birth from what the Old Testament itself said about it; for example, "Make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!" (Ezekiel 18:31 NASB).

When God said earlier, "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19), He did not mean that He was going to create physical or "spiritual" (metaphysical) "modules," tell them to lie still while He took out the old modules and "plugged in" the new ones, thus giving them a new "operating system." To suppose that would be the same silly "substance thinking" of Nicodemus.

The voluntary commitment of the will to the gratification of self gives direction to the whole of life. If we choose to live for self, that will be the direction of all of life. The end will determine the means and generate actions on those means to secure that end. It is like a vast river system. All the rivulets, streams and tributaries flow in one direction, toward the ultimate "end"—the body of water it flows into. Change the ultimate "end," and all is changed.

So it is with regeneration. In regeneration the ultimate "end" one is living for is completely changed, reversed. This brings a total change in all of life. It is like taking a massive river system and turning it completely over so that everything flows in the opposite direction. Such a complete, dramatic moral and relational change is far greater than a supposed change in some merely metaphysical inner "substance."

Conversion is turning to God from sin. Conversion is repentance in action. Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Peter told the crowd on the day of Pentecost, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). The Greek word for "convert" is *epistrepho*, "turn around."

Conversion emphasizes the act of turning; regeneration emphasizes the resulting change. The Greek word for regeneration is *palingenesis*. It means to have a new birth, to make new, to be completely new. It is a new relationship with God, new motives and desires, a new life and lifestyle, delivered and set free. Regenerated people "do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4). This is not brought about by some supposed "spiritual surgery" performed by the Holy Spirit but by His effective illumining, persuasive,

moral influence—and by the resulting indwelling of His presence and power. It is a total spiritual, relational, moral, character, and lifestyle transformation.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). This "creation" is not of substance or essence but of relationship and character. Believers are "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10).

"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Galatians 5:16, 17).

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to 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, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of God, he is none of His" (Romans 8:5-9).

The "carnal mind" is not a "thing." It is an attitude, a setting of the mind on the flesh. That attitude, that setting of the mind, cannot please God.

Regeneration is a heart and character transformation. It is the "new you" in Christ. A saved person is saved from the inside out. Before we were saved we "ran after sin"; now we "run from sin."

"Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:21-24).

"[You] have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Colossians 3:10).

We notice in these verses that the "old man" is something that believers are to "put off," and the "new man" is something we are to "put on." That tells us that both the old man and the new man are not some kind of *internal* "things." If they were, we could not put them off or on. Rather, they are *external*, something we are to put off and put on. That is, they are the attitudes, lifestyle and behaviors of the kind of persons we were then in contrast to what we are now. It is the outward result of the inner spiritual, moral, and relationship change (relationship with God through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit).

In regeneration God rescued us out of the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). The change is as definite and total as going from night to day, from prison to freedom. Have you been "transferred"?

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service, and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1, 2).

Sanctification.

To sanctify means to set apart as holy—set apart *from* sin and set apart *for* a holy purpose. It is to purify ("decontaminate") and make pure and holy. It contains the ideas of washing, cleansing, purification, separation, consecration, dedication, and service. Sanctification is the effect that salvation has on us. Believers are sanctified (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Christ Himself is our sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30). He sanctified us by His blood (Hebrews 13:12).

We are sanctified by the truth. Jesus prayed to the Father for us, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). God uses the truth—His word—to clean us up and "clean up our act."

The Holy Spirit is the divine agent in sanctifying us through the truth. The Holy Spirit knows how to apply the cleansing power of the word and He does so very effectively.

"God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Believers are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2).

It is God's purpose to sanctify us wholly (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Adoption.

The New Testament Greek word for adoption is *huiiothesia*. It means "the placing of a son." Adoption means sonship—sonship in relationship with God.

Christ came "to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Galatians 4:5, 6).

God has "predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5).

"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and

if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:15-17).

Believers in Christ are not spiritual "orphans." We are more than spiritual "foster children." The bondage is gone; the fear is gone. We are the sons of God, with all the privileges of that living relationship through Jesus Christ. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself is our Elder Brother, and He is not ashamed to acknowledge us as such (Hebrews 2:11).

By the Holy Spirit—the "Spirit of adoption"—we believers have an inner awareness of our intimate son-Father relationship with God. We address Him as "Abba"—Father!

"Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Baptism Into The Body Of Christ.

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

This is not referring to water baptism. It is not referring to the baptism *in* the Holy Spirit. This verse is referring to the act of the Holy Spirit in placing (integrating) the new believer into the body of Christ, the Church. The word "by" (*en*) in this verse is in the instrumental case; that is, it is something done *by* the Holy Spirit, as the context clearly indicates.

At salvation, the Holy Spirit is the agent (the one doing the baptizing); the new believer is the subject (the one being baptized), and the body of Christ (the Church) is the element (what the new believer is baptized *into*). That is 1 Corinthians 12:13. Then, at the subsequent baptism in the Holy Spirit, *Christ* is the agent, the *believer* is the subject, and *the Holy Spirit* Himself is the element. That is Matthew 3:11, "He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

"God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased" (1 Corinthians 12:18).

Each and every believer is a part of the universal Church and should find and function in his or her place in it. The Church has too many unattached parts "floating around."

Election.

As we have just read, believers are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2).

"Elect" means chosen, "selected out." God did the choosing. He did it before the beginning of time (2 Timothy 1:9). God did it according to His foreknowledge. The apostle Peter does not say that we are "foreknown according to the election of God," but that we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God." This is in harmony with Romans 8:29, "whom He foreknew, He also did predestined."

Of course, both foreknowledge and predestination occur together and simultaneously in the eternal mind and will of God. One does not precede the other. The point is that God's election is predicated (based) on His foreknowledge. This is not merely God's foreknowledge of what *we* would do, but foreknowledge of what *He* could and would do with us consistent with and without violating the principles of moral propriety. God always exercises His sovereignty and His sovereign election according to His perfect wisdom and character.

Paul affirmed that he knew that the Thessalonian believers were elect. "Knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God" (1 Thessalonians 1:4).

The Church is elect, chosen of God. The eternal purpose of God resides in the Church. God's purpose will not fail; therefore, the Church will not fail.

Although the Church as a *whole* is elect, it is up to individual believers to make their "calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).

Eternal Life.

Eternal life is the gift of God. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

The gift is not detached from the Giver. Eternal life is not a "self-contained package." One cannot come to Christ, accept the gift of eternal life, and then walk away. Jesus made it very clear in John 17:3 that eternal life is a *relationship* with the Father and with Himself. The elect believer's relationship with the Father and the Son is continuous, eternal. We must abide (remain) in Christ (John 15).

Believers must continue to "sow to the Spirit." "For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:8).

Because eternal life is in our relationship with the Father and the Son, it is stable. Eternal life does not come and go because the relationship of the elect believer with the Father and the Son does not come and go. The "eternal life relationship" is solid, stable, eternal. So, stay put.

He "is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

Results.

One of the results of this great salvation is that believers are overcomers in this present life through the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ by His Spirit. "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

The believer's strength is not in trying but in trusting. Victorious Christian living is more than us living *for* Christ; it is Christ living *in us*.

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4, 5).

When a person is born again, he or she is born an overcomer, *born victorious!* The victory is our faith. It is impossible to fall while we focus our faith on Christ. As we walk in the Spirit we will certainly not (no way!) fulfill the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). Christ is our security.

Another result of this great salvation is a fruitful, productive life (John 15:1-17). Galatians 5:1-23 describes the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh. Notice, it is the "fruit" (singular) of the Spirit, not "fruits" of the Spirit. This emphasizes the indivisibility of the whole. Godly character is a unit.

The fruit of the Spirit is contrasted to the works of the flesh. So then, the fruit of the Spirit is not some advanced stage of Christian character growth. The fruit of the Spirit is the essential moral character of the believer as a result of his or her relationship with Christ. The fruit of the Spirit will continue to grow, of course, but it will *be there* in the believer from the moment of his or her new birth. It will remain so long as he or she remains in Christ.

As we read down the list of the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit, we notice that love stands at the top. Love has been likened to a strong string on which all the other virtues are strung. Without love, it all falls apart. Jesus said that everyone will know that we are His disciples if we have love one for another (John 13:35). And 1 John 3:14 tells us that the way we can tell that we have passed from death to life is that "we love the brethren." The person who does not love his brother remains in death.

Right next to love is joy. Philip the evangelist went to Samaria to preach Christ to them. When the people heard the message, experienced the miracles, and were converted, "there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:5-8).

Our cities need joy. Our homes and families need joy. People need joy. Real joy is in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Do you have that living relationship? It is yours as a free gift. Come and receive it now.

What a great salvation!

Remembered Sin

I made a lash of my remembered sins;
I wove it firm and strong, with cruel tip,
And though my quivering flesh shrank from the scourge,
With steady arm I plied the ruthless whip.

For surely I who had betrayed my Lord
must needs endure this sting of memory.
But though my stripes grew sore, there came no peace,
And so I looked again to Calvary.

His tender eyes beneath the crown of thorns
met mine; His sweet voice said, "My child, although
Those oft-remembered sins of thine have been
like crimson, scarlet, they are now like snow.

"My blood, shed here, has washed them all away,
And there remaineth not the least dark spot,
Nor any memory of them, and so
Should you remember sins which God forgot?"

I stood there trembling, bathed in light, though scarce
my tired heart dared to hope. His voice went on,
"Look at thy feet, My child." I looked, and lo,
The whip of my remembered sins was gone!

—Martha Snell Nicholson

Appendix: The Influence Of Greek Philosophy On The Development Of Christian Theology

by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.

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Early Christians were slow to develop a distinctly Christian philosophy. When they did, their philosophical environment was Neo-Platonic. This mind-set directly influenced the historic development of Christian philosophy and theology.

Flavius Justinus (Martyr), ca. 100 - 164, admired Plato's philosophy and used some Platonic terms, but not necessarily with Platonic meaning. Tatian, a pupil of Justin Martyr, did not share his teacher's admiration for Greek philosophy; he believed that if the Greeks possessed any truth, they must have received it from The Scriptures.

Theophilus of Antioch, who wrote Ad Autolyicum, esteemed Plato. Minucius Felix, a Latin apologist, held that the philosophers had at least recognized some truths.

It was in the catechetical school at Alexandria, however, that philosophy gained its greatest influence in Christian theology. Titus Flavius Clemens (Clement of Alexandria), born ca. A.D.150, was the first of what might be called the Christian philosophers. Though he rejected the crude speculations of the Sophists, he held firmly to the belief that philosophy held an element of truth. He taught that the passages of Scripture that declare the insufficiency of human wisdom and that warn against being spoiled by philosophy applied only to empty Sophism and Epicureanism, but not to what he considered the best of philosophy. He maintained that philosophy brought the Greek mind to Christ, just as the Law brought the Hebrew to Him. To Clement, philosophy provided a natural framework for the expression of truth (Stromata I:3, 5, 11).

Having devoted most of Book One and some of the remaining sections of his Stromata to a defense of his philosophical approach, Clement proceeded to build on a Neo-Platonic metaphysical foundation what was intended to be a Christian philosophy. To him, the God of the Christians is the God of Plato, now worshiped by Christians more perfectly than by the Greeks. According to Clement, Plato plagiarized revelation from the Hebrews; this gave the Athenian's highest ideas a flavor of divine authority in the estimation of Clement.

What began in Clement was expanded in one of his pupils, Origen (ca.185 - 254). To Origen, sin is negative, a privation (which makes man the victim of sin rather than its responsible cause).

The prevalence of dualistic ideas provoked controversies in the Church. Tertullian (ca. 155 - 222) vigorously opposed the intrusion of Neo-Platonic philosophy into Christian doctrine. His cry was "free Jerusalem from Athens and the church of Christ from the Academy of Plato." Historically, it was the attitude of Clement, not of Tertullian, that won out in ecclesiastical Christianity.

In the Third Century A. D., Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, taught that God, being One, could not appear substantially on earth; therefore He could not have become man in Jesus Christ but rather filled the man, Jesus, with His Logos and power. Lucian of Antioch, his follower, believed that the Logos became man in Christ; however, Lucian's Logos was a lower, created essence and not fully God.

Arius, one of Lucian's pupils, fully absorbed Lucian's Logos concept. In A.D. 311. Arius was ordained a presbyter in the church at Alexandria. After several years of controversy, Arius was excommunicated. Because many of the clergy sympathized with his views, a struggle was precipitated that threatened to split Christianity. The emperor Constantine became alarmed. The result was the Council Of Nicaea (A.D. 325). Christ was declared to be of the same substance as the Father. This settled the matter officially, but not historically.

Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 265 - 340) agreed with Clement of Alexandria regarding the value of philosophy. He believed that Plato had been enlightened by God and was in agreement with Moses.

Augustine (A.D. 354 - 430) spent several years of his early life in Manichaeism. He was converted in A.D. 386 and later became Bishop of Hippo. His early writings, such as Contra Academicos, De Beata Vita, and De Ordine, have a strong Neo-Platonic flavor, which carried through into his later writings. He wrote, "Let every good and true Christian understand that truth, wherever he finds it, belongs to his Lord" (Epistle 166).

Augustine taught that the mind of God contains the eternal, changeless Ideas, Forms, or Archetypes of all things. These creative Ideas are independent of matter. They are the rationes seminales which the divine Creative Will developed within time into seen forms (De Ideis, 2). The view that these Ideas are in the Word goes back to Philo and the Stoic Logoi Spermatikoi, and, from Augustine, passed into medieval theology.

To Augustine, created things tend toward non-being; but so long as they exist, they must assume some form. That form is the reflection of the eternal and immutable Form (De Libero Arbitrio 2, 17, 46). Evil is that which tends to non-being and also tends to make what is cease to be (De Moribus Ecclesiae, 2, 2, 2).

Others also contributed to the influence of Neo-Platonism. Boethius (A.D. 480 - 524) wrote a Platonic theodicy, On The Consolation Of Philosophy, which had considerable influence in Christian theology.

Neo-Platonic ideas also influenced Christianity, especially in the west, through the pseudonymous Dionysius The Areopagite, a work dated not earlier than A.D. 500. The author took the Neo-Platonic ideas of Proclus and developed them into an esoteric Christianity. Erigena, Peter Lombard, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and others carried on the pseudo-Dionysian theme.

Not all leaders of the Latin Church held a high regard for Greek philosophy. Jerome cried, "What has Horace to do with the Psalter, Virgil with the gospels, and Cicero with Paul?" (The Virgin's Profession).

The influence of the ancient philosophies is evident in various contemporary religious views and practices.

The Platonic concept of God as an impersonal One, pantheistically immanent in nature and of which all visible beings are emanations, the concept of mystical reunion of the human soul with the Divine Mind and the acquisition of esoteric *gnosis* through meditation, inner mental and psychic development and ecstasy, and the concept of the more or less unreality of material being are all present in the various modern "mind science" sects. In most of these systems, Christ is considered to be some kind of demigod, a second-rate Platonic Logos who has attained to a high degree of liberation from the mundane and achieved an advanced spiritual (metaphysical) state. The Arian view of Christ is vigorously taught by the Watchtower Society ("Jehovah's Witnesses").

Some (but not all) of these concepts are deeply ingrained in the theology of eastern Orthodoxy. This is to be expected because the roots of the eastern Orthodox churches are deeply planted in ancient Greek thought and culture. Some of these roots are found in the ontology of Athanasius (ca. 298 - 373). Eastern Orthodox concepts such as the divinization of nature through the Incarnation of Christ, and *theosis* (the process of man becoming divine) are based on Greek philosophy. This philosophical premise leads to an ontological interpretation of 2 Peter 1:4 ". . . you may be partakers of the divine nature" "Divine nature" (*physis*) is automatically assumed to mean the very essence of God rather than His moral character (as the context clearly demonstrates).

It is in morality and ethics that philosophy has had its most far-reaching practical influence in Christian theology. This has developed on the one hand from the Neo-Platonic view of sin, and on the other from the Stoic concept of ethical self-sufficiency.

In Platonism and its subsequent variations the question of the cause and nature of evil was basic. The general assumption that sin and evil are ontological (that they have actual essence) contributed to and forms the basic premise of the doctrine of original sin. To be inherited, sin must have essence, real being; it must consist in some thing that causes evil choice and action, instead of being the moral character of the choice itself. With this mind-set it is common to regard sin in the heart as an essence instead of a voluntary choice; hence the term "sinful nature." This evil essence is regarded as a part of human nature. Although Augustine did not originate the concept, he passed it on to subsequent

generations. Calvin built heavily upon it. It is with us today.

It appears that the early framers and proponents of the doctrine of original sin did not use the Bible as their starting point. That is, the doctrine did not emerge on its own out of Biblical exegesis. Even though Tertullian objected to the influence of Greek philosophy on the Church, his stoic psychology was a tributary of the emerging new doctrine. The main stream, however, goes back to its headwaters in Plato and his notion of the fall of the soul. From this and from the assumptions behind infant baptism, Origen contributed to the doctrine. But even these in themselves would not have institutionalized the doctrine of original sin in the Church without the concepts of the prevailing philosophical milieu at the time of Augustine.

Largely out of his own personal experience—his struggle with temptation and his life of defeat in sin—rather than out of the Scriptures themselves, Augustine advanced the new doctrine. Being the bishop of Hippo, in North Africa, and being within the sphere of influence and authority of the Bishop of Rome and the developing papacy, Augustine had a strong position from which to inculcate the theology that emerged in his brilliant mind.

Pelagius (ca. 360 - 420) came to Rome from Britain. Coming from the purer form of Christianity that existed at the time in Scotland and Ireland, Pelagius was scandalized by the lack of holiness and the excuse of moral inability, and set out to correct the situation. Pelagius published his objections in the capital city. Coelestius, a pupil of Pelagius, adopted his teacher's ideas and promoted them aggressively. When Rome was sacked by the Goths in 410, Pelagius and Coelestius moved to Africa. Not long afterward Pelagius went to Palestine.

Coelestius remained in Carthage. A council met at Carthage in 412 and condemned Coelestius on several doctrinal points. In 417 the Bishop of Rome, "Pope" Innocent I, confirmed the condemnation of Coelestius and also censured Pelagius.

The regions ecclesiastically under Rome were strongholds of the new doctrine of original sin. Innocent I was succeeded by Zosimus, who reversed the judgment on Coelestius. An influential council in Africa protested the action of Zosimus. The Roman Emperor Honorius compelled Zosimus to reinstate the condemnation of Coelestius and the censure of Pelagius. The bishops of Italy were required to sign the condemnation. At least 18 refused to sign and were banished from Italy by imperial decree. And so the doctrine of original sin was officially established in the Church, first in the West and eventually in the East (Ephesus, AD 431).

Certainly Pelagius and Coelestius held doctrines that are indefensible; however, so did Augustine and his supporters, notably the doctrine of original sin. Although Augustine did not originate the concept, he formulated it and passed it on to subsequent generations. Calvin built heavily upon it. It is with us today, with all of its pleas of moral inability as an excuse for sub-Christian living.

The supporters of the doctrine of inherited original sin appeal to several Bible passages that have come to be viewed from the presuppositions of an essentially Platonic/Neo-Platonic frame of reference. That frame of reference is a prism that determines the definitions and connotations of certain Biblical words and phrases, notably "sin." Because these Biblical passages did not in themselves teach the later doctrine of original sin, they had to be "retrofitted" by *eisogesis* to conform to a Greek philosophical template.

It is important that we consider and understand these Biblical passages from a Hebrew/moral frame of reference instead of a Greek/ontological frame of reference. That is, we will regard the Scriptures in their natural definition of sin and holiness as voluntary moral choices, not ontological (metaphysical) essences. "*Spiritual*" does not mean "*mystical*." It has to do with moral choices and character, and a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Let us start with Job 14:4, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!" This verse is pressed into service to support the doctrine of original sin only because the doctrine it claims to support is first presupposed. Taken in its context and in view of the Bible's definition of sin as voluntary, this verse can mean no more than this: infants born in a morally and spiritually degenerate cultural environment will themselves become such. They will slide into the prevailing moral depravity by following the course of least resistance. This is made all the more certain by the brevity and difficulties of this life.

Job 15:14, "What is man, that he could be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous?" At most these words of Eliphaz teach the same as the previous passage. Every person who is "born of a woman"—that is, the entire human race—falls into voluntary moral depravity because of the combination of influences in that direction (the world, the flesh, and the devil).

Psalms 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin my mother conceived me." If taken precisely, the psalmist is speaking of the sinful character of his mother at the time of his conception and gestation. To make this verse teach the supposed "sinfulness" of David's natural being is to go against God's own definition of sin as a voluntary and therefore responsible choice. This is the strong poetical language of David's penitential psalm, expressing the fact that he had been a sinner from the inception of his moral ability and accountability, and that his mother had also been a sinner. He is confessing his generational pattern of sinning, not some supposed sinfulness in his human substance.

We find the same strong poetical language in Psalms 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." No one has ever seen a newborn baby get up and walk around the nursery telling lies to its parents, the other newborns, and the nurses! This verse affirms what the other verses we are considering affirm: people yield to temptation from the beginning of their ability to make moral choices. Trace the lifelong pattern of the wicked back as far as possible, and it will be discovered that they began their pattern of sinful choices as early as they were capable of making moral choices at all. To make this verse teach otherwise is to make it teach nonsense.

James 1:14 tells us that temptation comes from our own human desires. These are not evil in themselves, because Jesus Himself had them; otherwise, He could not have been tempted. Temptation does not come from some "indwelling" sinful nature; it comes from our humanity, just as it came from Jesus' humanity. In infants and small children, desire is developed before reason; couple that with the influences of the world and the devil, and it is no marvel or mystery why people universally sin before being enlightened by the Scriptures, influenced by the Church, and drawn by the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 13:23, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil." This verse itself refutes the assumptions of original sin. The moral bondage is the result of being accustomed to doing evil, not one's birth.

John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." This means that as flesh is produced from parental flesh, so a redeemed, purified and renewed human spirit is the product of the influence of the Holy Spirit.

John 9. The disciples asked if the man had been born blind because of his sins or his parents' sins. Jesus replied that neither was the case. Later, the Pharisees treated the man with contempt, saying that he had been completely born in sins (verse 34). In the first place, Jesus dismissed the rabbinical assumptions of the disciples. In the second place, we cannot base doctrine on an insult by the Pharisees.

Romans 5:12-19, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died because of the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (NIV).

Of course sin was introduced into human experience by one man. Adam started it. Because God saw that sin would become the universal practice, He

placed a limitation on the human life-span to set boundaries on mankind's opportunity to sin in this life. So *physical* death came to all men. The fact that all have sinned demonstrates the wisdom of God's pre-emptive action.

No Bible passage is interpreted correctly if that interpretation leads to a conclusion that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible as a whole. Any such interpretation is in error. If this passage is taken to mean that Adam's sin automatically made everyone guilty, consistency necessarily drives us to the inescapable conclusion that Christ's sacrifice automatically saved everyone. It does no good to plead otherwise. The Greek is very strong: "just as" ... "so also." To conclude otherwise one has to make an arbitrary assertion contrary to the fact. This *misinterpretation* forces its adherents and defenders to the error of Universalism—that everyone will be saved. The Augustinian view of this passage is a stronghold of Universalism.

In this passage Paul teaches that Adam's sin brought about a tragic universal result, but Christ's obedience (His death on the cross) brought about a glorious universal result. It states that each affects everyone without going into the specifics of *how*, beyond opening the door to universal sinfulness and condemnation by Adam and opening the way of salvation to all by Jesus Christ. Involved in this are universal *physical* death and universal *physical* resurrection (the latter taught also in 1 Corinthians 15:21).

Romans 7:7-25. This passage is quite lengthy. Please refer to it in your Bible. By no reasonable standard of Biblical interpretation can this passage refer to Paul's experience as a born-again believer. It is impossible for anyone to live in Romans chapter 7 and chapter 8 at the same time. To force this passage to teach the notion of "two natures" in the believer, it is necessary to fall back on the mysticism of Greek and middle-eastern dualism.

Paul is *not* describing the believer's on-going struggle with temptation. To illustrate and personalize the point, he is putting himself in the place of the unconverted person who is experiencing the war between that person's reason and his or her desires. It was his own miserable state before *his* conversion. These are the two laws that are in conflict within every sinner, producing the wretchedness mentioned in verse 24. The result of this conflict between reason and desire in every person who is a voluntary slave to desire is constant defeat, bondage, and spiritual death (death in sin is alienation from God because of one's sin). This is the "law of sin and death."

Sin "dwells" in sinners because choices are made within us. Please keep in mind the Biblical definition of sin as a voluntary commitment to and pursuit of self-gratification (Romans 8:5-7). That commitment "dwells" in us because it is the stubborn set of the soul (the "will"). For example, if greed "dwells" in us, it is because we put it there; we choose the passion and hold on to it in our souls.

Sinners are "sold under sin" because they voluntarily sell themselves to sin (1 Kings 21:20; 2 Kings 17:17; Isaiah 50:1; Isaiah 52:3).

The latter part of Romans 7:25 is not a conclusion; it is a summary of what had been said before. The conclusion is in chapter 8:1 and 2—"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..." The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made them free from that law of sin and death described in Chapter 7. So good news, believer! You do not live in perpetual sinning. You live in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! So, get out of Romans 7 and live in Romans 8. There is where every true believer stands.

Romans 8:3. "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh." Some suppose that the phrase "sin in the flesh" means that sin is a mystical substance that resides in and permeates our human flesh. This supposition is contrary to the Bible's teaching that sin is a voluntary choice, not an essence. Also, it misinterprets the Greek. If "in the flesh" refers to "sin," it would read "the sin *the* in the flesh." But it does not. Therefore, "sin" connects with "condemned." That is, in His flesh (His Incarnation, as in "the days of his flesh" in Hebrews 5:7) Jesus condemned sin by demonstrating that it is not an unavoidable necessity. We are not in bondage to it unless we choose to be. In His humanity Jesus overcame sin by the same spiritual resources that are available to all believers in the power of the Holy Spirit. "He condemned the sin of men and the condemnation took place in the flesh of Jesus" (A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures In The New Testament, Volume IV, page 372).

Also, "sinful flesh" means the members of the body that people use as tools to sin. They use their flesh in a sinful way. "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments [tools] of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:11 - 13 NKJV).

Romans 11:32, "For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all" (NASB. Also Galatians 3:22). Both of these passages contain the first aorist active indicative of *sunkleio* ("to shut together completely," as in a net—Luke 5:6). The King James Version reads "concluded," an obsolete use of the word that meant "to shut in, enclose". A.T. Robertson states, "This is a resultant (effective) aorist because of the disbelief and disobedience of both Gentile and Jew."

There are two essentially different perspectives on this word as it is used in these passages. Moulton and Milligan give it the meaning, "put them under compulsion to be disobedient or given them over to disobedience." Thayer says, "(the Scripture has shut up or subjected, *i.e.*, declared them to be subject)." In Galatians 3:22 the NIV reads, "the whole world is a prisoner of sin," but in Romans 11:32 the NIV reads, "God has bound all men over to disobedience." Both are interpretations of the word *sunkleio*.

To charge God with compelling people to sin is an outrageous slander on the character of God. It leads us to declare with Elihu, "I will ascribe justice to my Maker" (Job 36:3). This cannot be the meaning, as it is totally inconsistent with everything God has revealed about Himself and His own definition of sin as a voluntary choice. Also, consistency would tend to lead those who hold this view of these verses to universalism.

The other view is completely harmonious with both reason and revelation. Paul is his own best interpreter. When he writes in Galatians 3:22 that the Scriptures teach that everything is a prisoner of sin, he is referring to the Scriptures that he quotes later in Romans, Chapter Three. By using the neuter Paul is also affirming what he wrote in Romans 8 about the consequences of Adam's sin on the physical creation.

Accordingly, Romans 11:32 simply states that all moral agents (Jew and Gentile) have sinned and therefore are under the same sentence. They chose it; God let them have it with the all the bondage it brings. They are now locked up in "death row." The Law cannot save us; therefore we have only one hope—the mercy of God that is *offered* to all through Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 7:14, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy." This and other passages have been misused to teach the monstrous doctrine that babies of unregenerate parents are morally defiled and therefore go to hell (or at least to the imaginary place called "limbo") if they die in infancy. All that this verse teaches us is that by the grace of God the influence of the believing spouse is able to overcome the influence of the unbelieving spouse, create a prevailing godly influence in the marriage and home, resulting in holy children. At the very least, it teaches that the marriage of a believer to an unbeliever is still a valid marriage in God's sight, so that children born as a result of that marriage are fully legitimate.

Ephesians 2:3, "we all ... were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." (Notice, "were.") God is never angry with people because of their ontological nature—how and with what they were born. Guilt cannot be predicated of essence (substance). No one is guilty of something that is beyond his or her control. The Bible always teaches that God's wrath rests upon people because of their sinful choices and the resulting deeds and practices, not for their natural being. To teach that God's wrath rests upon people because they were born a certain way is an outrageous blasphemy, a charge against God, Who is the Creator of our natural being (unless one holds to the notion of dualism). It is an offense to His justice and a stumblingblock to unbelievers. "Nature" (*physis*) has the same meaning here as in 2 Peter 1:4. It is the moral nature of sinners, acquired by their own choices, that offends a holy God. "Nature" here can also refer to our corrupt cultural heritage. This concept is found also in 1 Peter 1:18 and 19. Sin is "natural" to sinners only in the sense of the combination of their culture, other influences, and habitually yielding to the desires of the flesh and of the mind. If sin were truly "natural," it would be beneficial, because it would conform to our nature. The fact that sin is so destructive shows that it is totally

unnatural.

2 Peter 2:14, "Having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin." This verse teaches that people who pursue the indulgences of the flesh are never able to get enough and so cease. This is a voluntary, never-ceasing bondage to sin. It is a voluntary slavery (verse 19; also Romans 6:16). The pursuit of the gratification of the flesh is like chasing a carrot on a stick. They who do so can never get enough to provide permanent satisfaction and thus end the pursuit.

1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Although this passage is written to believers, it is not written exclusively *about* believers. It refutes the teaching that "we" (human beings) have no sin (considering one's total personal moral history). All who hold this gnostic error are self-deceived. John is affirming universal sinfulness and therefore the universal need for the Savior. It certainly cannot teach that believers have some kind of essence called "sin" down inside of them. Here again, such a notion is contrary to the consistent Biblical definition of sin as a voluntary act of the will. Moral depravity is just that—moral, voluntary. It is not depravity of the "will" itself but of its acts, its choices. That is, that part of our human being that makes choices (the soul) is not depraved ontologically (in its essence), but voluntarily (in its commitment to selfish desires and the choices and acts that flow from that commitment). Sinners are not depraved in their being (except as their sinful lifestyle has a deteriorating effect on them—body, soul, and spirit); they are depraved in their moral choices and resulting lifestyle.

"The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16).

If sin is an ontological substance or essence instead of a moral choice, if it is a metaphysical principle that causes choice instead of being the evil choice itself, the logical and necessary result is to remove the blame for evil from the human moral agent and to place it instead on the metaphysical essence itself. Man becomes the victim of this thing called "sin," rather than the responsible perpetrator. Human depravity is regarded as a metaphysical state rather than a moral and voluntary choice. God's grace is needed to overcome, not voluntary depravity (depravity of choice), but an involuntary helplessness and a natural inability to choose in any way other than evil. This holds out to communicants no real hope of being rid of sin in this life (because it is said to be inherent in them), and leaves them in a continuous cycle of confession of sinfulness and appeal for forgiveness, even when no actual sins might have been committed. They are kept under condemnation for what they *are*, rather than for what they have chosen to do. ("Pray for us poor sinners. But don't hold us responsible, because we are helpless victims").

Spiritual regeneration becomes, then, a metaphysical rather than a moral change. It is the essence of the will ("heart") itself rather than its voluntary direction that is viewed as being changed in salvation. The Holy Spirit's agency

becomes metaphysically generative (following Augustine's idea of ideogenetic illumination) rather than morally persuasive and efficient. The new birth is viewed as metaphysical ("spiritual") rather than moral and therefore truly spiritual. The voluntary moral and spiritual change is regarded as the result of an inner regenerative process rather than regeneration itself.

Not only is sin viewed metaphysically, but so are virtues and qualities. We hear God's attitudes, dispositions, and choices spoken of as having essence. For example, God's "grace" is swallowed in the Eucharist or is poured into the heart by faith much as light is poured through a window glass.

From Stoicism and Neostoicism evolved a system of ethics and morality in which moral character is ascribed directly to outward actions instead of to the motive from which the actions spring. Moral duty becomes a certain minimum of outward works beyond which a surplus of merit is accumulated, instead of loving God and others and acting at all times in accordance with that love.

The idea that moral agents are able to accumulate works of supererogation ("surplus righteousness") has been a prime factor in the practice of praying to "the saints." It also vitally affects one's view of the redemptive work of Christ. It is behind the notion that Jesus Himself provided a surplus of righteousness that is dispensed to believers either by faith or by the Eucharist to make up for their moral failures. It tends to the idea that real holiness belongs only to the esoteric few, whose moral surplus will somehow compensate for the moral and ethical deficiencies of the many. Anyone who testifies to a life of victory over sin through Christ is regarded as spiritually proud and self-righteous.

This Christian duality, exoteric and esoteric, has resulted in a paradox, a double standard. High Stoic ethics are essential to Christ and to the initiated elite to provide a reservoir of good works to be distributed by "grace" to the mass of the adherents, who are generally deficient and to whom a life of holiness is at best a desirable option. Christ is viewed as assisting the helpless and making up for their unfortunate deficiencies rather than conquering our deliberate rebellion, breaking the power of voluntary sin in our hearts, and giving us victory over sin.

Perhaps a few more thinkers of the caliber and persuasion of Tertullian will yet arise to "free Jerusalem from Athens and the church of Christ from the Academy of Plato."

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