

March 2010: SD Website

SIN

Fellow Pilgrims:

Sin is a dominant theme in scripture. We do not find sin used very often in the public arena today. In 1974, Karl Menniger, M.D. wrote a book entitled *Whatever Became of Sin?* Thirty-five years later, the book is just as relevant. A Biblical understanding of sin will help us recognize it in ourselves and will help us better understand how sin can seem so attractive to so many in positions of trust.

Sin is more what I don't like in others. Sin is the foundation of public and private corruption, greed in the marketplace, possessiveness of other people, a sense of entitlement to get what you want when you want it regardless of others, and the willingness to use your own rank or power in society to force other people to do your bidding. These are only a few examples of sin. C. K. Chesterton said that whatever else is true about man, it is certainly true that man is not what he was meant to be. I will be looking at Paul's use of the concept of sin in Romans.

Before we look at sin in Romans, let me give you a broader picture. In the Old Testament, many terms are used to describe sin. Sin is failure, error, iniquity, transgression, trespass, lawlessness, and unrighteousness. These are all English translations of Hebrew words standing for sin. Above all else, sin is seen as an unmitigated evil and is directed against God.

In Romans, Paul uses the word *hamartia* forty-eight times to describe sin. This word means missing the target. In this use, sin would mean missing what we should be; to fall short of our best can be seen as a sin. When we sin, we fall short of God's glory "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3: 23). Romans 5:2 shows us how to no longer fall short of the mark: "Through him, we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God."

Paul's word choice shows the power and grip of sin. Romans 5: 21 reads, "As sin reigned (*basilenein*) in death." This verb comes from the noun *basileus*, which means a king. Since sin is a king or king-like in power, we are its subjects and slaves unless we have confessed Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior (see Romans 6: 6-20). However, Christ has freed us (6: 3-23). Paul also describes sin as *adika* and sinfulness as *adikos*. They stand for unrighteousness and unrighteous. The righteous or just person is *dikaios*, who gives to God and to others their just due. The sinner does not.

Paul also sees sin as godlessness. He uses *anomia* for sin and *anomos* for sinner. This comes from *nomos*, or law, and stresses the deliberateness of sin. The sinner knows the right but does the wrong. In the behavioral sciences, we use *anomie* to mean relative normlessness. A norm is a rule or law, which governs our lives. Sin is also disobedience or *parakoe*. This comes from the verb *parakouein*, which means to mishear, fail to hear, or deliberately fail to hear. Sin means closing your ears to God and only listening to yourself. Sin is also *parabasis* and the sinner is *parabates*. These come from *parabasis*, which literally means a stepping across a forbidden boundary between obedience and life

or disobedience and death. Sin can also be *paraptoma*, which means a slip or blunder. Sin then becomes a failure to concentrate or a failure in self-control.

What is the result of sin? According to Paul, sin results in *porosis*, describing a process of petrification. This eventually results in the complete loss of all sensation and the ability to feel. Yet, in spite of the power of sin, God never ceases to love us. As powerful as sin is, there is a more powerful antidote to sin, and that is grace. Sin is the opposite of faith. Sin lessens our surrender to God. Sin opposes, lessens, and obstructs the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives. Sin doesn't remain an external power but takes up residence within us and occupies us; sin dwells in us. Once sin starts, it spreads. Its killing power begets a moral and physical death in us.

In Romans, Paul shows us the universal human condition of being subject to sin (1:18-3:20). He shows us a way of being freed from the power of sin; that is, justification (3:21-5:21) and sanctification (6:1-8:39). Justification is our confessing that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. Sanctification is our willingness and effort to lead a Christ-centered life. I see sin in Romans as our refusal to accept our creatureliness. When I say, "This is my life. I can do with it what I want. I owe no allegiance to anyone," I am refusing to recognize my life as a gift from my Creator. It illustrates my willful refusal to acknowledge God as my Creator and my Lord. Ultimately sin is against God; sinful man is at enmity, or war, with God. C. S. Lewis observed that every day God claims and Satan counterclaims all of creation. To deny God, in any way, in any form, is to sin. To defeat sin, all you have to do is to invite the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into your heart, confessing Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Let me end with a prayer from St. Thomas Aquinas. "Give me, O Lord, a steadfast heart, which no unworthy affection may drag downwards; give me an unconquered heart, which no tribulation can wear out; give me an upright heart, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside. Bestow on me also, O Lord my God, understanding to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, and a faithfulness that may finally embrace you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

To whom do you belong? Whose are you—God's or Satan's?

In Christ's love,
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