

"Sin" and "Sins."

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We have no love for theological hair-splitting, and we shall certainly not be guilty of it in carefully distinguishing between these two things. Though closely connected, there is an important difference between them.

Both are mentioned in one verse of Scripture, Romans 5: 12. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

"Sin" is that which at the fall of Adam gained an entrance into the world. Just as the poison of a snake, once injected into a man's body, will run through his whole system doing its deadly work, so sin - the virus of that old serpent the devil - has permeated man's moral being to his ruin. The result of this is "all have sinned." "Sins," of thought, word, or act, whether of omission or commission, are chargeable to each of us.

"Sin," then, is the root principle, "sins" the shameful fruits that spring therefrom.

This being granted, let us go a step further and ask, What exactly is this "sin" which has entered into the world?

1 John 3: 4 answers this point, but, unfortunately, it is one of the verses where our excellent Authorized Version leads us astray. The one Greek word translated by the phrase "transgression of the law" really means "lawlessness," and is so translated in other Versions. The verse, then, should run thus, "Whosoever committeth sin practises lawlessness; for *sin is lawlessness.*"

There is an immense difference between these two things. "Transgression of the law" is, indeed, the breaking of a clear-cut commandment. There can be no transgression of the law where there is no law to transgress. There was no law in the world from Adam until the days of Moses, hence there was no transgression and sin was not imputed; yet sin was there in awful malignancy, and death its penalty was there. This is just the argument of Romans 5: 13, 14.

What, then, is lawlessness? It is simply the refusal of all rule, the throwing off of all divine restraint. The assertion of man's will in defiance of God's. Sin is just *that*. Such was the course to which Adam committed himself in eating the forbidden fruit. How bitter the results!

Instead of being like a planet, shining with steady light, and moving evenly onward in its orbit, controlled by the sun, man has become like a "wandering star," pursuing an erratic course he knows not where; though Scripture significantly says "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 13).

Instead of being master, he is mastered by the evil thing to which he has yielded himself. Sin has dominion over him and continually breaks out into sins. And, sad to say, it exerts such a deadening and stupefying influence upon the conscience that sinners seem unconscious of their plight apart from the grace of God.

When God's grace does act, and the Spirit works in life-giving power in a soul, the first cry is that of need and pain. The past years rise up before it, burdening the conscience. SINS become the question of the hour, and the trouble does not cease until the value of the precious blood of Christ is known and the soul can say, "My sins are forgiven me for His name's sake."

Then, afterwards - this is undoubtedly the experience of most believers - the question of SIN is raised. We discover that though our sins are forgiven, the root principle from which the mischief springs is still within us. What is to be done with that? This is a question indeed.

It is something gained if we discern that SIN lies at the root of our troubles. Some Christians seem to be too much occupied with the fruit to consider the root.

Some years ago a youth approached an elder Christian, complaining that in spite of all his prayers and efforts sins were continually creeping into his life and behaviour. SINS, SINS, was the burden of his cry!

"Upon what tree do apples grow?" was the only answer he got.

"Why, an apple tree," said the astonished youth. The question seemed so ridiculously irrelevant.

"And on what tree do plums grow?"

"On a plum tree." His astonishment deepened!

"And on what tree do sins grow?" was the next question.

A pause. Then, with a smile, he said, "On a sin tree, I should think."

"You are right, my lad," said this friend. "That's just where they do grow."

Note the point. The sins that we Christians have to deplore and confess are not little isolated bits of evil foreign to us, inserted somehow into our lives by the devil. Their cause lies much deeper. They spring as fruit out of that which is within us. Sin is within us. Let no man say otherwise when Scripture says, "If we say that we have no sin. we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1: 8).

What, then, is the remedy for SIN? The answer is, in one word, DEATH.

Death, or better still, the resurrection change, which will be the portion of us, who are alive and remain when Jesus comes. It will end sin as far as we are concerned, absolutely and for ever. The last trace of its presence in us will then be gone. Every Christian looks *on* in the happy anticipation of that. Do we all as joyfully look *back* to the hour when death the great remedy came in - the death of Jesus?

"In that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God" (Rom. 6: 10).

The matter, therefore, stands thus: He died FOR *our sins*, atoning for them; He died TO *sin*, and therefore taught by the Spirit we recognize that we are identified with our great Representative, and faith appropriates His death as ours. We, too, then, are "dead to sin," and cannot any longer consistently live in it (*see* Rom. 6: 2). We therefore reckon ourselves "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6: 11).

There is just this difference: the sin to which He died was purely an external thing. "In Him is no sin" (1 John 3: 5). With us it is not only external, but internal too. Sin is the ruling principle of the world without us; it is also, alas! the ruling principle of the flesh within.

But there is more than this. The death of Christ was not only our death to sin, but it was the total condemnation of the sin to which we died. Romans 8: 3 runs, "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and by a sacrifice for sin [margin] condemned sin in the flesh." At the Cross SIN, in its full hideousness, stood revealed, for lawlessness reached its flood-tide height then; and in that holy sacrifice its judgment was borne, and its condemnation expressed.

Let these distinctions, then, be carefully noted. *Sins* have been borne and their judgment exhausted. *Sin* has been exposed and condemned, and to it we have died in the death of Christ. The Cross was all this and more. What heavenly wonders encircle it! How does it stand alone, unapproached and unapproachable!

". . . the Tree
Centre of two eternities
Which look with rapt adoring eyes
Onward and back to Thee."

We read in John 1: 29 of "the sin of the world," and in Romans 8: 3 of "sin in the flesh." Is there any difference between these two? and how do you distinguish them from the sins of an individual?

The expression "sin of the world," in John 1, is about as comprehensive as can be. Sin, the root of it, and every offshoot, down to its finest ramifications in the world, is to be taken away by the Lamb of God. His Cross is the basis of it, and He Himself will do it, as foretold in Revelation 19-21.

"Sin in the flesh" is somewhat different. Sin is, of course, the same in essence wherever it is found in the universe of God, whether in demons or men, but as far as this world is concerned "the flesh" - the old fallen nature of the children of Adam - is the great vehicle in which it resides and works, producing sins in individuals universally.

Picture to yourself an immense electric power station. Imagine a whole network of live wires, quite unprotected, radiating in every direction from it all over a vast city. Shocks, consternation, death, would be in every direction!

Sin is something like the subtle and indefinable electric fluid making its influence felt in every direction.

The flesh is like the wire, the seat of the electricity, and the vehicle through which it acts.

Sins are like the shocks dealt out in every direction, resulting in *death*.

The sin of the world is like the whole concern, wires, electricity, power-station and all! A clean sweep of the hateful thing will be made. Such is the value of the Cross. Well might John say, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

We commonly speak of the forgiveness of sins. Might we not as correctly speak of the forgiveness of sin?

No; for Scripture does not speak so. Forgiveness of *sins* is found continually in the Bible, forgiveness of *a sin*, too, forgiveness of *sin*, the root principle, *Never!*

A simple illustration may help. A mother is greatly tried by her little son, who is rapidly developing a most ungovernable temper. One morning, irritated because his sister is far more interested in her doll than in the motor-car which stands throbbing outside the house, he attempts to make her look at it, and in the struggle brings her head with a crash against the window, shattering the glass, and severely scratching her face.

The boy is sent to his room by his mother, and on his father's return, shortly after, he gets very properly punished.

By evening the punishment has had its desired effect. He comes to his parents in tears, confessing his wrong. Seeing that he is thoroughly repentant, they forgive the angry act. But do they forgive the evil temper from which it sprang? By no means. That would be, more or less, to condone it. No; they strongly condemn it. They lovingly, yet firmly, show him its nature and its consequences, and they seek to lead him to abhor and condemn it as thoroughly as they do.

"God . . . condemned sin in the flesh." He did not condone nor forgive it; and the work of the Holy Spirit in us leads us to condemn it, even as God has condemned it, to the end that we may know deliverance from its power.

How do you reconcile the condemnation of sin in the flesh with the fact that believers may and do sin?

No reconciliation is needed. *Condemnation* is not *eradication*. The same Bible that speaks of the

condemnation of sin (Rom. 8: 3) also speaks of the fact of sin being still in us (1 John 1: 8), and supposes that the believer may sin, in pointing out the divine provision for such a case (1 John 2: 1). It even plainly tells us that as a matter of fact we all do sin (James 3: 2).

It is God's way to leave the flesh and sin still in the believer, that, practically learning their true nature, he may experimentally come into line with God's condemnation of them at the Cross, and find his life and deliverance in Another, so that he can say, in answer to the cry, "Who shall deliver me?" "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7: 24, 25).

Is sin never taken completely out of a believer? It says in 1 John 3: 9, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin."

At death, when a believer is "absent from the body and present with the Lord," he is done with sin for ever. At the Lord's coming all believers will get their glorified bodies without one trace of sin being there. Until then we have the presence of sin in us though it is our privilege to be delivered from its power.

The verse quoted does not in the least conflict with the other Scriptures we have considered. It simply states for us the *nature* of the one born of God. He does not practise sin. ("Practise" rather than "commit " is the real force of the word here). It is not his nature so to do. In so saying the apostle viewed believers in their nature as born of God, without reference to any qualifying feature, which may assert itself in the wear and tear of life.

For instance, a man might walk along the sea-front of some fishing-village with a friend, and, pointing to a large net with innumerable cork-floats attached, say, "What a great boon to the fisherman is a substance like cork, which cannot sink." "Indeed," says his friend, "it can, for only an hour ago I watched the men recovering that very net from the bottom of the sea; the weights attached to the under side were too heavy, and, overcoming the buoyancy of the cork, dragged the whole lot down."

Who was right? Both were, allowing for their respective points of view. The former was thinking of the abstract qualities of cork, the latter of a curious and abnormal thing that happened in practice.

The apostle John writes from the abstract point of view, and sin in a Christian is certainly not a *normal*, but a most abnormal thing!

Christians, however, do sin all too frequently. Do such sins do away with the settlement reached both as to sin and sins, with which the Christian starts?

No. The cross of Christ is the ground of all. There *sin* was condemned. There atonement was made, so that forgiveness reaches us when we believe. All, too, is the gift of divine grace, and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11: 29), *i.e.*, they are not subject to a change of mind on God's part. They are for ever.

Sins after conversion do, however, greatly upset the Christian's happiness, and dispel the joy both of forgiveness and relationship with God, until in self-judgment such sins are confessed, and through the advocacy of Christ we get the Father's forgiveness (*see* 1 John 1: 9: 2: 1). Painful lessons in this way we all have to learn, but there is profit in them. We discover thus the true nature of the flesh within us, and that the only way to keep from gratifying its desire is to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5: 16).

Did the Lord Jesus Christ in dying bear the sins of everybody? Would not that follow from the fact that He takes away the sin of the world, according to John 1: 29?

Scripture puts things thus:

"He died for all" (2 Cor. 5: 15).

"Who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2: 6).

"He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2: 2).

These verses indicate what we may call the Godward aspect of His work. It includes ALL within the wide sweep of its benevolent intention; and propitiation has been made on behalf, not only of believers, but everybody; the whole world.

When we come, not to the *intention* or *bearing* of His work, but its actual *results*, we find things put differently. When we view things on the largest possible scale, and "think imperially," in the best sense of the word, John 1: 29 does indeed apply, but that is quite in keeping with the fact that sin and all that are eternally identified with it find their part in the lake of fire.

If we think of things in detail, we cannot say He bore the sins of everybody, for Scripture says:

"Who His own self bare *our* [*i.e.*, believers'] sins in His own body on the tree " (1 Peter 2: 27).

Hence it is that again we read:

"Christ was once offered to bear the sins of *many*" (Heb. 9: 28). Thanks be to God that we find ourselves amongst them!