

## What is Sin?

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What's the status of sin today? Is it completely out the window, blown away by the so-called revolution of morals? When an American Bar Association report urges that laws making prostitution a crime should be repealed, it might seem so. Or is sin merely tarnished, a product of the confusion of values in our society - a society in which more and more Roman Catholics are getting divorced and remarrying, are advocating birth control, and where priests want to get married.

Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant theologians are condoning homosexuality. Nevertheless, last month the Catholic Church issued a "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics," reaffirming the Church's traditional stand against extra-marital sex. The Declaration defined sin as follows: "A person sins mortally not only when his action comes from direct contempt for love of God and neighbor, but also when he consciously and freely, for whatever reason, chooses something which is seriously disordered... The Church holds these principles not as old and inviolable superstitions, not out of some Manichean prejudice, as is often alleged, but rather because she knows with certainty that they are in complete harmony with the divine order of creation and with the spirit of Christ, and therefore also with human divinity..."

The question is: Is sin relative, is it based only on man's standard of right and wrong, or is it absolute, based on "the divine order of creation?" At the recent National Conference for Divorced and Separated Catholics in Boston, a woman said, "I was brought up in such a good Catholic family that I really doubt if I could ever consummate a new marriage because of the church's position against remarriage. When is the church going to change?" I added the italics here to emphasize the basic issue. The Church made its stand because of a belief that it was in accordance with God's will. This woman wants the Church to change in accordance with her will.

And the ramifications of this debate go far beyond the one issue of the sanctity of marriage.

At one time, when the Christian Church dominated, Western Europe completely, there was just one standard of value, what the Church said was right. But as our knowledge of man's variety of cultural norms broadened, it seemed that there was no universal standard of conduct for all mankind, that what was right by one man's conscience was not necessarily true of his brother on the other side of the world, or even down the street.

Again, the basic issue is whether man's conduct is based on his view of the truth or upon God's. Before the fall of man, God as the parent was carefully raising Adam and Eve as His children, and had they continued to remain one with Him, they would have learned, as all children learn from their parents, the right path. In fact, if they had truly been united with Him in heart, they would not have been able to do anything that would hurt Him or go against His will; even fallen man does not deliberately set out to hurt those he loves.

Because they chose to disobey their loving Father and to go their own individualistic, self-centered way, Adam and Eve became separated from God and no longer knew The Way. So we've had to find our own path in life, often going through many twists and turns, even doubling back upon ourselves, going through thorny briar patches, up and down steep mountainsides. If we had gone our Father's Way, it would have been all smoothed out for us by loving hands, straight and true.

But we are not completely separated from God, only caught between two worlds. We still have a remnant of that original mind which our Father gave to us to guide us, the part of us which seeks to do good, which wants to follow the true path.

How can we know what that true path is? Especially today. In a recent article, Leo Rosten commented, "I cannot help concluding that the fortresses of faith are experiencing the most profound alterations in centuries. Church authority is being challenged on a dozen fronts. Traditional creeds are being drastically revised. Hallowed canons are being shelved.

Religious practices are changing daily. Church leaders are beleaguered by new, bold, persistent demands - from their clergy no less than from their congregations." When there is so much confusion, the only answer is to know God's Will, God's desire, so that we can live His way. And this is also the only way in which a unified culture can come about. God is eternal, absolute and unchanging. His ways are also eternal, absolute, and unchanging. Only man's understanding of them has increased or decreased in different ages and different religious expressions.

Some people think of sin as just a transgression of some arbitrarily established (i.e., manmade) religious code. But it is much more than that. God, when He created the universe, did so according to certain fundamental principles. When Lucifer tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, he deliberately set himself against those principles and thus became the enemy of God. His desire is to rule the world in place of God; in the Bible (II Cor. 4:4) Satan is called the "god of this world." Therefore, we can define sin as anything which, either in thought or action, makes a condition to have give and take with Satan, the enemy of God. So sin is not something decided upon by men; it must be judged from God's viewpoint.

The fall was the most terrible tragedy in mankind's history. Through the fall, man lost his connection with God. God had wanted Adam and Eve, when they reached maturity, to become the pure, true parents of mankind. Instead they were defiled and God has never been able to see His original ideal for man fulfilled. That ideal would have come about on the basis of a God-centered family.

The family is the key to everything.

We learn our basic values, we learn how to love each other, we learn about caring and about give and take -- all in the family. Today, with the breakdown of the family accelerating rapidly, we can see the effects of not having true, God-centered families more clearly than ever before.

Sociologists and psychologists have provided plenty of evidence that problems in the home are the root cause of crime and violence; the loneliness and depression that lead to alcoholism, suicide, drug use, or other destructive behavior; and the loose attitude towards morals today.

How are we going to get rid of sin? First of all, we must discover the original source of the problem. We must know we are sinful. Sin is separation from God. When we are separated from God, we feel very distant from Him, so He becomes very vague and obscure. That is why we can say things like, "When is the Church going to change?" Instead of saying "How am I going to change myself to be like God wants me to be?"

Today, even the things that man has historically recognized as sinful are being challenged: "Well, it's not so bad. Maybe it's natural for man to be this way. We have to get rid of our aggressive instincts, don't we? And it's natural for man to express his sexual appetite, isn't it?" People can say these things only because we are so terribly ignorant of God, of God's nature, that we don't even know any more what is hurting Him, how wrong we are, how far away we have come from His original ideal for us.

It is very difficult for sinful man to recognize his sin because he lives in a world in which Satan, the origin of evil, has control. When we don't see any standard around us, how can we know for sure what is right and wrong? It is not easy for us to admit we are wrong. No one wants to think of himself as selfish or egocentric, so we don't realize how self-centered we really are. We don't want to think about it too much.

Before we can begin to solve the problem of sin, we must learn to recognize it in ourselves. Let me give you an example. When Jesus was teaching, many people accused him of being a sinner, of being a blasphemer, and even a prince of Satan. Even if they didn't accept everything that he said, shouldn't they have at least recognized him as a good person?

Why couldn't they? Because Jesus was like a pure, untarnished mirror and when he was held up before them, they saw themselves reflected in the mirror. Those who were blasphemers saw a blasphemer in Jesus. Those who were on Satan's side, saw Satan in Jesus. It was easier to see it outside themselves than to recognize their own sinfulness, the impurity which kept them from knowing God and seeing God only in Jesus.

Impurity will be found to be impure only when maturity comes. Anything evil can be done when there is darkness all around to cover the act. But when the light comes, a new understanding comes. The light of God's truth must come into the world to separate sinfulness from purity. Through an understanding of the Divine Principle, specifically through an understanding of the fall of man, we can clearly understand man's satanic nature, because the Divine Principle is the new light of God.

Truth shows us the standard, shows us how much we have fallen away from it, too. But that is not enough. In order to change ourselves, we must feel our sinfulness, feel how deeply we are hurting God our Father. Through prayer we can come to understand our own sinfulness, how we bear the burden of the fallen nature we inherit from our ancestors, how our own lack of love affects others, how our separation from God weighs on Him. When we understand, when we start closing the gap between ourselves and God, then we can repent, then we can ask forgiveness, we can begin to purify ourselves. The closer we come to God the more we will feel our impurity, but we cannot shed it unless we experience that feeling of repentance first.

Even then, we cannot completely rid ourselves of sin because as fallen men we are still under Satan's dominion and he can still accuse us. That is why we need a Savior, a sinless man who can be our defender before God and ask God to forgive us. God could not refuse such a request from His true son. That is why the Messiah, sinless man, must be the mediator between God and man. We cannot come back to God except through the Messiah, we cannot solve the problem of sin in ourselves and in this fallen world without the Messiah.