

Override Your Flesh With a Repentant Heart

“Salvation is received through repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, being justified by grace through faith, man becomes an heir of God, according to the hope of eternal life.”

Sin has a bad name. Even using the word seems to imply ignorance and bigotry in contemporary culture. It's fine for an individual to have strong feelings about values, but it is definitely not fine to “impose” those preferences on others.

Despite these objections, moral sensitivity does seem to be hardwired into the human soul. While no culture has cornered the market on personal standards, every person has the ability to sense when things are not right. Anyone who did not believe that on September 10, 2001, was converted on September 11. Individuals who lose this ability are considered sociopaths. Sin is for real.

Three realities of sin

To appreciate how God can rescue us from this force, we need to understand what it is and what it does. Three complementary views of sin help us grasp the scope of its destructive nature.

Legal—Sin as crime. God has established certain “laws” of conduct (e.g., the Ten Commandments) and we commit sin by disobeying them. In this sense, transgressing God's law is a spiritual “crime” that incurs punishment. This may be the most widely held view both inside and outside the church.

Indeed, we have all “fallen short” of the character of God (Romans 3:23). The Bible uses the metaphor of sheep to

describe us as wayward and self-willed. And that's the point—my stepping over the boundaries God has provided for my welfare and peace of mind says that I have decided to replace Him as the sovereign of my life. One commentator describes this as living as though God does not exist. The offense is not just in the deed, but in the rebellion it represents. Our deeds reveal who we are, fallen beings mired in selfishness and exploitation.

Relational—Sin as alienation. The peace and joy that flow from knowing God intimately are simply unavailable when we demand control of our lives. This breakdown with our Heavenly Father distances us from Him and makes the human race the ultimate dysfunctional family.

Jesus illustrated this with a story about a young man who demanded his inheritance prematurely and used it to abandon his family for a life of self-gratification (Luke 15:11-32). With everything he could ever want in hand, he walked away, preferring control over a pittance to a fortune gained by loyalty.

Alienation leads to deprivation. The young man started off feasting with rented friends but ultimately found himself feeding with the pigs. Eventually the consequences of our separation from God will catch up with us as well. If I refuse to be reconciled to Him, He will allow my condition to become permanent in the form of eternal separation.

Volitional—Sin as slavery. The self-centered life promises freedom but delivers the opposite. One of the most destructive aspects of sin is its ability to dominate us, to take away our choices, our volition.

Sin is much more than discrete deeds such as holding up a convenience store. The Bible also describes it as a dark force that controls our hearts and reinforces our selfishness. In its most overt forms, it manifests itself as addiction,

violence or injustice. Paul describes this bondage in stark terms: "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God" (Romans 8:7,8). Ironically, the more I grasp for freedom, the stronger the chains that bind me. Sin and self-centeredness feed on each other.

If sin can be an act of transgression against God, a state of alienation from God, and a form of spiritual slavery, where do we turn for hope? The good news of the gospel is that there is salvation larger than our sin!

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