

## **‘The Nature, Effects, and Cure of Sin’**

### ***1. Introduction: Seeking To Know Sin***

When we undertake this study we are immediately confronted with the fact that it is most difficult for man to deal with the subject of sin. If sin exists and man is a sinner, then sin, in the Biblical understanding, is a thing which is irrational. Hence it is almost impossible to speak about it in rational categories. Also, if man is a sinner, and sin is of the nature of rebellion against God, then it will be virtually impossible for man to analyse and examine sin, since he is personally so involved. This does not mean that any examination of it is out of the question, but it does show that true examination of it is most difficult, if not impossible. Somehow man would need to have an external revelation or indication of what it is. Doubtless the Bible supplies this, but then is man ready to hear what it says? Certainly he has much invested in his own sinfulness and rebellion. If this were not enough then the Bible also tells us

- (a) of the innate deceit of sin, meaning it covers itself anyway, and
- (b) of the deceiver, Satan, who goes out to deceive the whole world (cf. Heb 3:12 and 13, II Cor. 4:4, Rev. 12:9).

Before we actually examine the origin, nature, effects and, generally, the problem of sin we will need at least preliminary definition on which to work, until we can more completely define it. A good working description of sin is ‘any attitude or act which is not in conformity with the will of God’. For the most part sin presents itself as a reality, especially to the conscience. We will see, later, that human inabilities to accomplish, or innate human weaknesses are not real cause for guilt. True guilt comes when man does not live consonant with what is his true nature. Whilst he may never define ‘true nature’ yet he has some sense of it. He sees himself as one who should live without committing evil. When he commits sin or evil of any kind he knows on the one hand that he ought not to have done it, and on the other that his shame is that he seemed unable to desist. He even tells himself that if he were right and true as a man he would have desisted. He is saying, really, that sin is no essential part of true humanness. For this reason his guilt brings shame.

Perhaps it is this fact that sin brings shame that causes man to rationalise his failure. He still wants to retain his self-esteem, and has to rationalise the wrong he has done, and rationalise it in his own eyes. To do this he must also rationalise it in the eyes of others. This may constitute the deepest element of sin’s deceit. It is the point where evil triumphs for when it adds further deceit to evil it has triumphed just that much more. It has that much ‘more suppressed the truth in unrighteousness ‘.

## ***2. The Origin of Evil***

Man has been confronted, always, with the fact of sin, and so the problem of its origin. Those who hold to a monistic view of the world - that the world is all one - conclude that sin is part of that oneness. Those who hold to a dualistic view - that the world has two basic components, good and evil, see a conflict between these two. Some see good as paramount, others evil. The question they have to ask is, 'How will this conflict be resolved?' The Christian-Judaic view has been that sin is no essential part of creation and the universe, and that even evil powers, although not created evil, cannot overcome God and the good because they are, in the ultimate, merely creatures.

The problem of origin, even for the Christian-Judaic view is that since God is good, and His creation also good (Gen. 1:31) that the presence of evil is inexplicable. Facing the fact that evil is present, and that man sins, how then can God be said to be triumphant? How does it happen that evil is in the universe, and from all outward appearances is quite powerful? If God is truly reigning, then it should be a small thing to vanquish sin out of His omnipotence. whilst these questions are surely permissible the talk of a sudden act of omnipotence to destroy and obliterate evil is a very simplistic way of reasoning, and does not take the deepest elements of the matter into full consideration. The attempt to do this is call 'theodicy', and we will have to enter into this before we conclude our study.

We have inferred already that man cannot, of himself, examine the subject of sin. It has often been observed that no man can tell the pure truth, for, for various reasons he has bias or prejudice along certain lines. Hence we have said that the understanding of sin must be a revelation, and the revelation a Biblical one. We need to see what the Bible indicates concerning the origin of sin.

In fact it says very little about sin's origin, if indeed, anything. In Romans 5:12 we read, 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all (men) sinned....' From this reading sin was not in the world prior to Adam's sin. This must be true. Sin was not an essential part of the creation (gen. 1:31). Suddenly Adam sinned. Eve - and so - Adam - was tempted by the serpent. In Rev. 12:1-9 (cf. Luke 10:18) this serpent (Rev. 12:9) is also called 'the dragon', 'the devil' and 'Satan'. Since Genesis 1:31 says the creation was essentially good, and Job 38:7 infers that all angelic powers were present and joyful at the present creation, then it would seem that Satan's rebellion must have taken place in heaven at some time, either before the creation of man, or following shortly after his creation. Passages concerning Satan which are found in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 are debated by scholars as to whether they refer directly to him or not. If they refer directly then Ezekiel 28:13 'you were in Eden, the garden of God' and the following narrative would suggest strongly that Satan, falling into pride (i.e. love of himself and his beauty) became corrupted from his true state. Isaiah 14:13-14 quotes Satan as saying, 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.' His ambition is in this:- (a) He will be above 'the stars' which are the angels, and (b) he will set up his throne, i.e. he will reign as God reigns. If this is the authentic picture of Satan then we can see that he was seeking to draw man into his prideful plot.

However these things may be, created man was tempted and sinned, and this, in the practical sense, is the origin of sin so far as the human race is concerned. It does not give us a rationale of what sin is, or its genesis. Also it simply says, 'By one man sin entered into the world'. This seems to infer that sin was

already an entity before it came into the world, and of course this is consonant with what we have said of Satan's prior evil. II Peter 2:4 speaks of 'the angels when they sinned', so calling their rebellion sin. Nevertheless for the most part we think of sin as that which humans do, and do not quite understand sin in the celestial sphere.

We can see, then that very little is said, Biblically, about the origin of sin, the most direct reference being a N.T. one, long after the event. Job 31:33 has a reference to the event: 'Have I covered my transgressions like Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom?' but even here 'Adam' may simply mean 'man' or 'mankind'. Similarly Hosea 6:7 - 'Like Adam they transgressed the covenant' may mean 'like men'. If in some way Ezekiel 28 refers to Adam and not Satan, then man's sin would be seen as a pride which came to him following his creation. Job 15:7-8 'Were you the first man to be born, or were you brought forth before the hills? Do you hear the secret counsel of God and limit wisdom to yourself' is certainly rhetorical poetry and not an objective statement concerning Adam. Nevertheless it gives us something of the mind of Eliphaz the speaker, and how Adam was viewed. Isaiah 43:27 - 'Your first forefather sinned' could mean Adam, but seems to mean Abraham. In all these references then we have no comprehensive picture of the origin of sin.

When, below, we examine the actual act of sin committed by Adam and Eve, we will note that evil seems to have its explanation for being present in the world, in the light of the fact of the serpent, and of Satan and his powers as they are elsewhere in Scripture presented to us. Whilst, again, that is no true account of sin's origin it is all we have, and seemingly, all we are permitted to have. Theologians have pointed out that sin is not a true entity. It has no true or essential being. It is not a created thing, but an attempt to negate what is truly created. Also it has been pointed out that the more the debate concerning the origin of sin proceeds, the more we are forced to use terms of reality concerning sin as though it were in fact a reality. This is because we do not employ terms, ordinarily, which can discuss something which, whilst dynamic, is from a creational point of view a non-entity, a negative of the essential reality, an attack upon the truth, that is, of 'things-as-they-really-are'.

### ***3. Man's Original Sin***

#### **Man and His Creation**

Here we are on good Biblical grounds. The Bible does not speculate concerning origin, or for that matter anything. The Hebraic way of statement was simply to show what is, what happens, whether it be right or wrong. Hence the story of the temptation by the serpent of Adam and Eve and their consequent fall into sin is clearly seen and can be clearly understood.

If it is, then, to be clearly understood it must be read against the background of the creation account which immediately precedes it. We must understand that man is made in the image of God. This means that man is not God, and not as God, although he is like God. In the creation account man is accorded a place given to no other creature. He is like God, and he is commanded to be fruitful, to multiply, to replenish the earth, to have dominion over it, and to subdue it. These are high demands. Man, then, must be a wonderful creature. Also he is a creature, i.e. he is contingent for his true being upon God. Other Scriptures such as Psalm 8:4ff., Acts 17:24-30, Eccles 7:29, 3:11, I Cor. 11:7

indicate that man has three elements and roles, namely

- (i) That of being a son,
- (ii) That of being a creature, end
- (iii) That of being a servant.

In addition, from a comparison of Jeremiah 2:13 (where God is called 'the fountain of living waters') and Proverbs 4:23 'where man is likened to a fountain 'flowing forth the issues of life'), we gather that man is a morel creature, that he is intended to relate to God in total contingency for all his person and life, and that his work is to contribute to the well-being of creation. He has been 'crowned with glory and honour'. He is 'little less than the angels', and in his glory he has been set over his universe. Genesis 11:6 indicates that there is little, if anything, that man cannot accomplish. He is indeed a creature of great dignity and high office, albeit he is comparatively a frail creature within the mighty universe.

### **The Temptation**

The truth concerning man is that he is a creature whose powers lie within his contingency upon God. Out of that he is, as it were, 'unmanned'. Hence the purpose of Satan is to lure him from being contingent. His insinuation, 'Has God said you may not eat of every tree of the garden?', is intended to make man see God has deprived him of something. Satan presses the point that man has not only been deprived of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but also of 'being as God, knowing good and evil', that is, being a truly morel being without needing to be contingent. This is represented as a breath-taking freedom. It is not represented as diabolical evil, which it is.

I Tim. 2:13 says that Adam was not deceived. Eve was deceived or beguiled, but Adam did what he did deliberately. Hence his act can be called nothing less than conscious and deliberate rebellion against God. Hence man ceased to be voluntarily contingent as a son, a creature and a servant. whatever would be his future approaches to God, they would be egocentric and calculated to be to his own advantage. The serpent approached the event seeking to instill first of all doubt, then (illicit) desire, and so seeking to evoke disobedience.

### **The Nature of (the) Sin**

This discussion should be valuable for our future examination of the nature of sin. Adam's sin has been called 'original sin', meaning it was the sin committed at the beginning and by which sin has its origin for man. In fact Romans 5:12 says that 'all men sinned', meaning that when Adam sinned they sinned in him.<sup>1</sup> Some have said that Adam's sin was imputed to man, and this is true, but the thrust is that man, being a solidary body of humanity, concurred with Adam, and participated in the event. Some have simply said, 'what Adam did we all did since we were all in the loins of Adam.'

We have seen that the serpent's ploy was to lure man from his relationship with God, and this he did by insinuating that God was withholding from man something which was his innate creational right and ability. Had men trusted God he would not have thought in this way. James 1:13-15 is the classic description of

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<sup>1</sup> For a full treatment of this interesting truth read John Murray's 'The Imputation of Adam's Sin'. (1959)

temptation and sinning. 'Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no man, but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it is conceived gives birth to sin: and sin when it is fulfilled brings forth death.' This description really gives the origin for each man of sin within himself.

This was what happened to man. He conceived the desire to be as God, and not simply to be like God. He attempted what by nature of the case was impossible, and so sinned. The consequence of this sin was death. He had been warned he would die. whilst it is true that in a real sense the outcome of that sin was biological death which was yet to come, yet he actually died in the day he sinned (Gen. 2:17). His death was a death in relationships to God, and all that God was, or is. Hence the one intended to be the image of the Living God became a dead person. In another sense man did not appear to die. However since he refused contingency he could not partake of the life of God. Whilst it is true that man must 'live and move and have his being' in God, yet he is not truly alive in the sense that Adam was. Someone has said, of men's approach to biological death, 'Man is afraid of death, not simply because he has to die but because he deserves to die.'

### **The Results of the Sin**

Romans 5:12ff. suggests that man is now under (a) the tyranny of sin, and (b) the tyranny of death. Each exerts dominance over man because of, and by means of, the other. Heb. 2:14-15 (cf. I John 4:18) says that 'fear of death' (i.e. fear of punishment) keeps mankind in constant bondage to Satan.

In Romans 8:5-7 Paul points out that sinful man is now incorrigible so far as God's law is concerned. Man is now flesh (cf. John 3:6, I Peter 1:24, Romans 7:14) for instead of being in union with God he is hostile to God and His law. Hence he has a "mind set" which is of disobedience. He has no desire to be subject to the law of God. Indeed it is impossible for him to truly obey it. Doubtless the knowledge that he is alienated from God exacerbates his hatred of God (cf. Rom. 5:10, 1:30, Col. 1:21), and the knowledge that he is doomed to death vitalises his fleshly disposition.

### **The Constant Rebellion of Man**

P.T. Forsyth once said, 'God does not find man as a straying sheep, but as a rebel with weapons in his hands.' Romans 1:18-32 is the locus classicus of man's constant rebellion. Seen by Jews as being the rebellion of Gentiles, it remained for Paul to remind them that sinful Jews also have the same attitude and experience. In this passage he first says that God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. He means that the truth of God, of created man and the universe, which are really 'things-as-they-really-are' cannot be suppressed unless some act is committed which is directly counter to the good. That is impurity must happen in order to suppress purity, hatred to suppress love, and so on.

Man has no authentic ground on which to do this, since God-is-He-is can be known simply by listening to, or reading, creation. There all the Godhead can be known. Man however has rejected that Godhead and made his own gods. His idolatry is a rejection of true deity. The effect of this rejection and the consequent idolatry is immorality or the illicit use of sex. This is followed by sexual perversion and deviation. Indulgence in this leads to a base mind in

which more distinctions are blurred and rejected. Then follows a break-up in relationships, to the point that all forms of evil appear. Paul is also saying that in one sense the whole experience of evil constitutes God's wrath coming upon man. The burden and misery of sin is the way in which God reveals His wrath. Wrath, felt in the conscience, brings man into anguish.

All of these elements emerge as a result of the original sin, or man's fall into sin through Adam, and his consequent alienation from God. If then it be asked, 'what of the image of God in man?' the answer may well be in the words of a writer, 'The image of God in men is irreducible, but reversible'. He means, 'The gifts God has given man in reflecting Himself, man now uses for his own selfish benefit. Such use brings man to depravity in its worst forms.' None can fall lower than man, since man alone was made in the image of God.

## ***4. The Nature of Sin***

### **(i) General Introduction**

Sin is a practical fact. Sin is a practical reality. Sins are, generally speaking, self-evident happenings or things. We commit immorality; we do evil things; we thief, lie, are cruel, end so on. We do not need to create theories regarding sin in the abstract since it is a present reality for us. However, when we do examine it insofar as we can, end gather data concerning it, it makes us less afraid. We know it for what it is, especially as we learn what it is from the revelation of the Scriptures.

In order to do this we will first of all look at its personal origin in ourselves, then see its linguistic meaning in both the Old and New Testaments. especially by seeing the different acts of sins. Then we will be able to see what is the nature of sin. This is not simply in order to know what it is and how it works, but in order to be able to better understand its cure, both by the redemptive work of the Messiah in his death and resurrection, end also its cure, in experience, within our own lives. Finally we will be able to see its ultimate destruction and obliteration.

### **(ii) The Personal Origin of Sin**

We have seen that Scripture does not occupy itself very much with the origin of sin, probably because it does not regard it as a true entity. However, personally for us, it is a very real thing. For example, sin relates to pollution, to penalty, end to the power which it exercises over us. Yet, for working purposes the passage we have seen in James 1:13-15 is all we need to know of its personal origin.

Unfortunately we need to discuss another element. One of the ways in which we rationalise sin is to blame it onto evil powers. 'Satan tempted me and I fell' is meant to sound like, 'Satan pushed me and I fell; I did not fall of my own volition.' We cannot at all ascribe sin to any outside power. True, these tempt, seek to deceive and to seduce, end even to threaten, but man is inviolate if he will be. We must then seek in some other way to evade responsibility for our acts.

The way in which this is done is seen in the proverb, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, end the children's teeth are set on edge.' In Jeremiah 31: 29-30

and Ezekiel 18:1ff. this misconception is attacked. The principle is, 'Every man shall bear his own sin. The father will bear his, and the son his. The son shall not bear the sin of the father, nor the father the sin of the son. The soul that sinneth it (and it alone) shall die. And it shall not die for the sin of another.' A great principle is enshrined here, namely the responsibility of every man for his own sin. This alone, of course, gives man dignity. It takes him out of a dreadful natural predeterminism which makes him the victim of heredity and environment, and the plaything of various so-called natural forces. Ezekiel 18 portrays the son of a good father making his own decision to go counter to his good father, choosing to do evil because he wants to. It also portrays the son of an evil father who chooses to do good and not evil.<sup>2</sup> In other words, every man is responsible for his own sins. whilst heredity, environment, and other factors, even, possibly, genetic factors may seem to weigh heavily against him, yet he can resist these and prove successful against sin. It is scarcely likely, however, that this will be the case if he is not in union with, and contingent upon, God. Within such contingency his hand is not forced. Doubtless in Israel the outcome of idolatry - visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation - is at first sight a forced fate. However 'of them that hate me' is the conditioning clause. Also this relates primarily to idolatry, and to those who persist in idolatry. Deut. 24:16 says, 'The father shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sins.' (cf. II Kings 14:6)

In Ezekiel 33:10-20 as in fact in Ezekiel 18 Israel is moaning because it is suffering in exile. It has deep self-pity because what it suffers is for the sins of the forefathers. God denies this. Each man suffers for his own sins. Self-pity is a form of sin. Each man must be a responsible, dignified creature, no matter what comes upon him. All of this, of course, brings us back to the more general origins of sin. We again are posed with the questions of monism and dualism, but the real question is of personalism. Each man is personally a real being with moral sense and obligations.

Related to this is the story in John 9 of the man born blind. Jesus said he was not blind because of his own or his parents' sins, but 'for the glory of God'. Much, then, of what seems to be suffering for sin or from sin, is not so at all. God is working in all things, and we must be careful about ascribing certain things to sin.

Seeing then, that man, even though he is fallen is required to be a responsible being in this world, we can proceed to look more closely at the nature of sin.

### **(iii) Man and His Sin in a True Universe**

What we have to do is retrace our steps and see, both in Genesis 3 and Romans 1, the situation and nature of fallen man. Before his sin he was a true existent in a true creation. He had no guilt because he was in harmony with all things - God, the creation, his neighbour, and himself. The moment he sinned and chose his own autonomy of life, as against contingency upon the Father-Creator, his situation changed completely. Genesis Three describes him as seeing himself as naked, of becoming afraid of God, of trying to cover his

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<sup>2</sup> James Denney 'Studies in Theology' p.91, says, 'what we inherit, strictly speaking, may be said to fix our trial, but not our fate.'

nakedness and as hiding from God. His autonomous state was not one of security.

Romans One provides us with some clues when man rejected God he automatically rejected the true nature, not only of God but of himself, his neighbour, and the creation. Hence, in order to prove himself right he must get rid of the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of 'things-as-they-really-are'. He must continually be going against the evidence. He must continually re-rationalise God, the creation, himself and others to fit his new scheme. This is very demanding, and, even, unnerving.

All of this becomes particularly unnerving when what was meant to be destiny becomes fate; what was the love of God now appears as His enmity, and what was pleasurable existence seems to defy him. Going contrary to the functional nature of creation he receives the functional-existential kick-back of guilt. It is no wonder he believes God's world to be hostile, and feels himself an alien within it. He learns, increasingly, to hate God, and this increases the tempo of his rebellion and sin. In fact his very sin (or sins) becomes his fete. Only when we see him as an arrant person, denying his essential sonship, servanthood and creaturehood, do we realise the deep misery of man. It is against this background that we can go on and study the words which are used for sin, and the actions which portray it.

#### **(iv) Sin in the Old Testament**

##### **(a) Words Relating to Sin**

This is a large subject, and can be pursued in any Bible Dictionary or book on Biblical words studies. Without nominating the Hebrew words, or their Greek (Lxx) equivalents, there are verbs and nouns which cover the following ideas:- 'A missing, a failing', and so 'error, fault'; 'wandering, straying, inadvertent moral error'; 'to revolt, rebel, transgress' that is, defiance of God's rule and even the guilt that attaches to it; 'refusal to obey, godlessness, profanity' which implies a ruthless violation of that which is holy. Out of this comes the idea of being impious, estranged from God, and thus 'polluted'. Inner states are also described, so 'to act wrongly, or in a perverted way'. From this word comes the idea of perversity, iniquity and guilt. There are also words for being bad, doing evil, being evil, for being wicked, and acting as guilty persons. Also there are words for acting violently, doing wrong acts perversely, doing injustice, making toil, trouble and mischief. There are simply descriptive words such as pride, folly, uncleanness, deceit, impurity and the like.

However, when all these verbs and nouns are used, they still need to be seen in their context, and the states of being and action which they represent. The words do not merely cover the various kinds of sins, but put together they make a composite picture of what a sinful man really is. If we can speak of the components of sin, or of its constituent elements, then we must see a sinful person as being under his sins, being affected by them, in fact being manipulated and controlled by them. This comes out in passages like Isaiah 57: 20 'The wicked are like the restless sea which casts up mire and dirt'. This must mean that a wicked man is rarely at peace, and the pollution which he has tried to cover is spewed up from time to time, especially in the crises and conflicts of life. Psalm 1:4 says, 'The wicked ... are like chaff'.

**(b) States of Sin**

We have some dynamic descriptions of sin, sin contained by the sinner, and the sinner himself. David is the classic example, and sin is understood, at least in its experiential elements if we read Psalms 32 and 51 in the light of his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah her husband, especially as the prophet had exposed him. He had refused to acknowledge his sin, and in Psalm 32 he tells of the dynamic and disastrous effects, as sin within him sent him into fear and physical and mental states (psychosomatic states). In Psalm 51 he speaks of the awful agony of desiring purity in 'the secret parts'. Other Psalms such as 31 and 38 speak of the agony of sin, especially as it is felt as the wrath of God, a theme which we will pursue later. Hence the psalmist can say, 'There is no soundness in my flesh because of thy indignation: there is no health in my bones because of my sin.' He actually feels his guilt.

This leads us back to the classic account of sin and guilt; namely the event of Cain and Abel, and the sin of Cain in murdering his brother. In this story Cain's heart is apparently not right before God when he offers his sacrifice. His anger at Abel because his sacrifice is accepted whilst his own is rejected puts him into an angry frame of mind. God says, 'why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well shall you not be accepted? If you do not well sin couches at the door.' It is really saying that when the conscience is clear sin has no power, but where it is not then sin couches like a lion, ready to pounce and ravage. Cain does not hear the warning, and this is precisely what happens. Sin seizes upon Cain and ravages him. Cain murders his brother.

In Psalm 40:12 this picture is extended; 'For evils have compassed me without number; my iniquities have overtaken me, till I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.' They are again the ravaging beasts, and in Psalm 22:12,13 and 16 the sufferer bears the onrush of such animals, 'Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open their mouths at me like a ravening and roaring lion.' Again in Psalm 65:3, '...our transgressions prevail over us', and Proverbs 5:22, 'The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin

**(c) The Corruption of the Heart**

The picture we had of man being a pure fountain and reflecting 'the Fountain of Living Waters' (Jer. 2:13, cf. Prov. 4:23) is lost sadly in the picture of his now depraved heart. In Proverbs 25:26 we see that 'Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.' This was basically Adam's sin. The classic statement of man in his fallenness is Genesis 6:5, '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.' Following the flood the statement was (Gen. 8:21) '...the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth'. When we add to this Jeremiah 17:9 'The heart of men is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt', with Eccles 7:29, 'God made man upright, but he has sought out many devices', then we see the state of man's heart. This accords with Isaiah's words that the wicked cast up mire and dirt. Hence God says (Isaiah 29:13) 'This people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me'. Psalm 14:1, 3 says, 'there is none that does good ... They have all gone astray; they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one.' The Preacher asks, 'Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean. I am pure from my sin'?' (Eccles. 7:20, Proverbs 20:9).

**(d) The Hardening Nature of Sin**

Once we begin to enter into this experimental side of man's sinfulness we are met with an unending variation of emotions, sufferings, sorrows and experiences. Sin distresses, sin hardens the heart, sin causes pollution, sin makes men stubborn. We understand it all, because it is 'our scene'. Here we are on familiar ground.

When we understand that the heart is the whole of life, the seat of the emotions, the mind and the will, we begin to understand that sin is a matter, primarily of the will. It is the will which is against God. 'They say... 'We will follow our own plans, and will act, everyone, according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.' 'They did not obey or incline their ear and everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart' (Jer. 18:12, 11:8). Hence the constant reiteration of 'Harden not your hearts'. When we think of the hardness of the heart of Adam, then of Cain, and following this of Lamech, and then of the violence which proceeds from the hard heart, it makes us see why Nimrod and his followers could be 'hunters of men' and seek to set up a tower in defiance of God. Even Israel, the people of God, become defiant amongst their idols so that God in His grace must come upon them and 'take out the stony heart', in order to put in a heart of flesh.

**(e) Sin from the Womb**

In Psalm 58:3 it is said, 'The wicked go astray from the womb. They err from their birth, speaking lies.' This brings us back to our principle that man is responsible for his reaction (or response) to heredity and environment. We have seen that 'the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth' (Gen. 8:21) and indeed Eccles 12:1f. warns the young to remember the Creator from their youth upwards, so that they do not fall into evil ways and have a sad end to life. David cries, 'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions' (Psalm 25:7), whilst Job says, 'Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me inherit the iniquities of my youth.' God says to Israel, 'From birth you were called a rebel.'

The early nature of human decision is seen in the account of Esau and Jacob fighting in the womb of their mother, and Jacob grasping the heel of his brother at their birth. Again the sons in Ezekiel 18 obviously make their choice very early in life as to whether they will follow their fathers or not. From all of this we gather that man's sin is from the womb. Hence David's statement, 'I was born in sin, and in iniquity did my mother conceive me. Linked with this is the cynical cry of Job 14:4, 'who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean', and Job 15:14, 'what is man that he can be clean? Or he that is born out of a woman that he can be righteous?'

**(f) Covenant Sin**

By creation all men belong to God although they may defy Him. However, those of the Abrahamic covenant belong to God in a covenantal way. Add to this the fact that covenant was structured for the good of mankind, let alone God's people, and you have the obligation to obedience which should have bound them. Even the Decalogue, when given to them was given on the basis of grace rather than law-for-itself. Because God has delivered them from bondage they must serve and obey Him. In Deut. 30 He even gives them a heart to obey Him.

In the Covenant given to Moses the sin of Israel can be forgiven and cleansed by the sacrificial ritual. The sin of Israel, if it can be said so

must be even more coram deo, i.e. from the heart, or as David says, 'the secret heart', and is therefore so reprehensible. In Isaiah this covenantal sin is expressed: -

‘Our transgressions are multiplied before thee; and our sins testify against us;  
For our transgressions are with us, and we know our iniquities:  
Transgressing, and denying the Lord and turning away from following our God;  
Speaking oppression and revolt,  
conceiving and uttering from the heart lying words.’

In Malachi 1:6 God appeals to Israel, ‘A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where then, is my honour? And if I am a master, where is my fear?’ In Jeremiah 3 He expects Israel to follow Him for His Fatherhood to them, and they do not. We see then the deep nature of sinfulness, and as we regard it the helplessness of man to comprehend it. Hence God, in speaking of the evil of the human heart (Jer. 17:9) says, ‘Who can know it?’ The answer is, ‘Only I. I search the heart’.

### **(g) Conclusion**

We have to be honest and say that our study of sin in the O.T has been very sketchy. We have only touched upon a few elements of sin, and sinfulness. When in Jeremiah 10:23 it is written, ‘I know O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his path’, the prophet is telling us of men’s utter weakness. He is unable even to know where to go, let alone to go there. He is a helpless creature. For all his rebellion, defiance, and self-centred-ness he can go nowhere. He is without a true and final goal. He needs God. He cannot change.

Isaiah 1 speaks of men being sick and diseased from the top of his head to the extremity of his sole. He is repulsive in his pollution and evil. when we read the Psalms which speak of his guilt, and the descriptions of his inner evil we are revulsed. We know something of his whole weariness of life. Impregnated with guilt, corruption, sorrow, heaviness, restlessness, defiance, rebellion, loneliness, hostility against God, self and man, filled with hardness shame, remorse and fear, sinful man is a pitiful, indeed terrifying creature. This is the O.T picture of man in his sin, and he is only the more reprehensible where he sins against the Covenant. Nor when we turn to the N.T is he any other than he is in the O.T

## **(v) Sin in the New Testament**

### **(a) Introduction**

In any study of sin in the N.T. we would have to presuppose the background of the O.T We would also have to understand the four hundred years of inter-testamental background to Israel. At the same time the coming of Christ was the coming of one who was guiltless, sinless, and positively obedient. Here is one who is not caught in the toils of sin. when Isaiah saw the Lord in the Temple he saw the holiness of God and in a flash his own sinfulness. When Christ was present his own, though unassuming, holiness had its effect upon his hearers. He certainly delineated sin by his obedience. He said on one occasion, ‘If the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!’

meaning that they had so rationalised sin as to make it out as righteousness. Hence to others he said, 'For judgement I came into the world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees asked him, 'Are we also blind?' He said, 'If you were blind, you would have no guilt, but now that you say, 'We see,' therefore your guilt remains.' This was somewhat the same as a later saying, 'If I had not done among them the works which no one else did they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.' Truly he delineated sin, and polarised any indecision that may as yet have remained.

We will expect, then, in the N.T. a deeper understanding of sin than that known previously, and may look forward at the same time, to its cure.

### **(b) Words Relating to Sin**

The N.T. not only uses many of the words current in the O.T., but also gives actual descriptions of sin. Basic words used are, 'a missing of the mark', 'unrighteousness', 'lawlessness', 'impiety', 'transgression', 'a fell', 'depravity', 'desire', 'lust', and 'disobedience'. There are of course the terms 'fornication', 'adultery', 'stealing', 'lying', and so on.

Romans 3:23 is not perhaps intended to be a description of sin, but it is. 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God' surely means sin is not reaching, and living in, the glory of God. I John 3:4 has it, 'Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.' That is a clear enough description. Here all sin is lawlessness. It is going against the law. James also has a description of sin (4:17) 'whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.' Mere refraining from evil is not good enough. Righteousness must be done. Again in Romans 14:23 Paul says, in regard to acting from faith, '...whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.'

### **(c) States of Sin**

Jesus said, 'Whoever commits sin is the bond-slave of sin'. In this way he told us the effects of sin. Paul said, 'By the law is the knowledge of sin' (Romans 3:20). Christ certainly emphasised the law, and insisted that it must not in any way be broken, and that it would not be abrogated. It must be fulfilled. The Sermon on the Mount, far from abrogating what had been said in the past insists that obedience must be no less than was required. In fact, if anything the requirements are much higher.

This leads us then to states of sin. Like Isaiah, Peter is convicted of his own sinfulness by being confronted with Messiah. 'Depart from me, Lord,' he cries, 'for I am a sinful man!' We have seen that Jesus' holiness and goodness acted to polarise the sins of others. For their part many saw light as darkness, and darkness as light, but his coming made their sin undeniable. Only by destroying him could they live in peace, for they hated his confrontation. Thomas might be seen almost as a parallel to Peter in seeing himself in the light of Christ. In his case it was the resurrected Christ. He cried, 'My Lord, end my God!'

The man who was paralysed represents man in a state of sin. In his case it was clearly connected with his sickness, or rather his sickness with his sin. Physically disabled he also represents the paralysis of sin. Again the man at the pool of Bethzatha (John 5) may well have been ill because of sin. Healed he is told not to sin again lest a worse thing befall him. The sinful woman of Luke 7 recognises the state in which she has lived, and comes to total forgiveness.

This releases in her a beautiful love. Negatively we see the deprivation which sin had brought, and now the new glorification forgiveness had wrought. The thief on the cross is virtually unaware of the depth of his sin until he hears Christ ask forgiveness for men from the Father. Suddenly he sees he is being justly punished, and seeks liberation from sin's consequences.

We could multiply these cases in the Gospels. However, in both Gospels and Acts men are in states of sin which can only be relieved by the Gospel John draws large numbers to the baptism of repentance which has the promise, proleptically, of the forgiveness of sins. The apostles preach a message which releases men from sicknesses, demons and sins in much the same way that Jesus had ministered.

It is Paul who states certain general principles concerning man's states of sin. His classical treatment in Romans 1:18-32 we have seen. He shows the stages in which sin accelerates and takes deepening forms of evil. In Romans 3:9-18 he is very practical about man's state of sin, generally, but in Romans 7 he creates a masterpiece of description when he talks about the law and the way it exacerbates sin in man. He then goes on to talk of sin which indwells even believers, and of its innate power being greater than that of the innate power of the believer. In Romans 8:5ff. he speaks of the incorrigible state of fallen man - man-in-the-flesh. In Ephesians 2:1-3 he speaks about man being dead in trespasses and sins, and shows the rebellion of unregenerate man. He is by nature the child of wrath. He is energised by the prince of the power of the air, the evil spirit at work in fallen man.

John in his epistles also speaks of man who relates to Satan, the world, and the flesh. He cites Cain as a man under the Evil One. He says the regenerate man does not sin because he is renewed. He says that to love the world is to be involved in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, and to pass away with the world. He also describes the man who is under idols.

These paragraphs represent only a very sketchy outline of the state of man in sin which we see in the N.T. This part of Scripture is really out to speak of the redemptive work of God. Even in the book of the Revelation where the historic evil of man and the Satanic system is described, the great triumph of the book lies in evil being vanquished. In fact this book shows how sin outplays itself until, at the last, it is destroyed. All that is evil is destroyed in the lake of fire.

#### **(d) Man Under Sin**

This section is not confined to the N.T. for we have seen man under sin in the O.T. However it is in the second part of Scripture that man under sin is described in more general terms, and the subject of wrath and judgement more definitely set out. The states of man under sin are here set out:

- (i) Sinful man, in Adam is in rebellion against God. He is under the sentence of death even if he does not personally sin 'after the likeness of Adam's sin'. He has sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12ff).
- (ii) Man, himself has sinned, i.e. committed acts of sin, and has fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).
- (iii) Man in his state of sin is under the power of sin (Rom. 3:9, John 8:34f). This means he is in a state of slavery.

(iv) Man is worthy of death because he has sinned (Rom. 1:32, 6:23, cf. Heb. 2:14-15).

(v) Man is under the wrath of God. This wrath is (a) presently being revealed (Rom. 1:18, Ephes. 5:6), and (b) will eventually come upon man climactically (I Thess 1:10).

(vi) Man is under the domination of sin as to its power, its pollution and its penalty. He experimentally knows suffering from guilt, and guilt enchains him within the context of power, penalty and pollution. Likewise he is under the bondage of evil powers - Satan, the principalities and powers, and the world-system which itself is under the god of this world, its prince, Satan. Because man is guilty sin has its power through guilt, and Satan through sin.

(vii) There is no way out of man's dilemma. He has no power to release himself from the power of sin or the evil powers themselves. He is helpless.

(viii) As we have seen, man lives under the wrath which is sin, which is guilt, which is God's holiness in anger against his evil (Hab. 1:13, Nahum 1:2, etc.).

In the light of sin in the world, man in states of sin, and man under the power of sin and the evil powers, the question is, 'What is the cure for sin? How does man escape from sin?'

## *5. The Cure of Sin*

If we look back through our notes to sin in the O.T and the N. T., and study closely the nature of sin, and man in his state of sinfulness, and his states of sin, then the problem seems insurmountable. Yet when we read I John 3:8, 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil', then we realise that the incarnation and the work of Christ was intended to cancel out all that Satan had ever done, and to destroy (Heb. 2:14-15) his power for ever. when we read the promise of the purging of the creation - earth and heaven - in II Peter 3:9ff, and its actual happening in Revelation 21:1-5, then we see that the task is not impossible, and will in fact be concluded. Our understanding of the nature of God, by means of the Scriptures, tell us that He is of Purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and that He cannot look upon sin. He will surely vindicate His holiness by destroying all evil, and purging His universe, so vindicating His nature and His name.

Having stated this principle in general we, nevertheless, wonder how it can work out in particular. Light is shed if we look at the following points:

(i) (i) The defeat of sin and evil was promised in the O.T Forgiveness was promised and the coming of the Kingdom, which would lead to a new, pure way of life, and a new creation. These promises were related to Messiah, and the outpouring of the Spirit of God. Through him would come the regeneration of (a) the human heart, and (b) the entire creation, celestial and terrestrial.

(ii) John the Baptist and Jesus both announced the immediate coming of the Kingdom and the forgiveness of sins, as also deliverance from all forms of bondage.

(iii) In Acts it is claimed that Messiah has come, fulfilled the Scriptures and has defeated sin and evil, and man may now come into freedom. The people of the Way practise victory over such sin and evil.

(iv) There are as yet unfulfilled prophecies and intimations of the end-time, when eschatological freedom will come to the redeemed and the universe in which we live. In view of these principles we can see light. We begin to understand the 'He appeared at the end of the age to put away sin' (Heb. 9:26), and so we can take heart.

Our business, at this point, is to scan the promises, see the actual destruction of sin through Messiah, and understand the way in which the Gospel, through the Holy Spirit is working to effect the cure of sin within us.

### (i) The Promises Which are to Meet the Need

The fall of man is immediately helped by the promise of Genesis 3:15 that the seed of woman will crush the seed of the serpent. The Abrahamic Covenant promises blessing to all who relate to Abraham, and the 'blessing of Abraham' is primarily justification (cf. Gen. 15:6, Gal. 3:13-14). The famous prophecy of Gen. 49:10 of the ruler to come has universal connotation. Ultimately this seed of Abraham is narrowed to Judah, David and then Bethlehem.

It is, however, in the history of Israel that we meet the promises of future forgiveness, regeneration of the human heart and renewal of the entire creation. We could be excused for thinking these applied only to Israel, with of course the exception of universal renewal. The N.T. indicates that the promises extend beyond literal Israel to the new people of God, the church and the redeemed, and that the cure of sin is not confined to Israel. Let us look at these promises:-

- (a) **The Promise of Forgiveness.** The clearest is in Jer. 31:31-34. It is also in Ezek. 36:24-28. We must remember, however, that Israel knew God to be the pardoning God (as in Micah 7:18 'who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression'; Jer. 9:23-24, Exodus 34:6-7, etc.). Yet great statements like Isaiah 1:18 are scattered through the prophets. It was the mode of forgiveness which would change, i.e. forgiveness would not come through the sacrifices as such. How then, would it come?
- (b) **The Promise of Cleansing and Regeneration.** There are particular promises to Israel of cleansing. Zechariah 13:1, and Isaiah 4:2-4 when read with Ezekiel 36:24-28 speak of purifying, the kind of purity which David prayed for, and experienced, in Psalms 51 and 32. There is, however, a national regeneration, also, which is promised. Ezekiel 37 is one of these promises. In fact the outpouring of the Spirit such as in Isaiah 32:14-20, 44:1-5 and Joel 2:28f. point to the renewal of man, and even creation.
- (c) **The Regeneration of Creation.** Some passages seem to point to the renewal of Israel and her land, and yet even go beyond that to the heavens and earth. Isaiah 11 is one of the first, whilst Isaiah 65:17ff, and 66:22f. relate to a universal happening. Habakkuk 2:14 (cf. Isaiah 11:9, Zech. 14:9) speaks of the glory of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea.
- (d) **Promises of a Deliverer and Deliverance.** The theme of the Messiah, the Davidic King, the Intercessor is interwoven in the prophecies. Some, such

as Isaiah 59:15-21, Ezekiel 37:15ff., Isaiah 42:1f., and Isaiah 61:1f.' show us that the one to come will bring deliverance from bondage. That bondage (cf. Luke 1:67ff.) is from 'the hands of all that hate us', the enemies of the children of God which we interpret to mean sin, Satan, the evil powers, and the world-system.

These great promises are to find their anticipated fulfilment by the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus.

### **(ii) The Coming of the Promised One and His Kingdom**

Suddenly John the Baptist is on the door-step. The Kingdom is imminent. People must (and may) be baptised with the baptism of repentance with a view to the remission of sins. Messiah is near. He will forgive sins, bring in the Kingdom, baptise with the Spirit. Israel, incredulous, rushes to hear John and large numbers are baptised. John then points to Jesus as the very one who will baptise with the Spirit. He says, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' This comprehensive statement is stunning in its import, and makes references to many of the prophecies of the O.T (e.g. Isaiah 53), and virtually replaces the sacrificial cult with the person of Jesus himself. The religious leaders of Israel came to realise this as Jesus exercised ministry. Later Stephen, and then Paul appeared to teach that the old system of sacrifice and forgiveness was outmoded. The Epistle to the Hebrews confirms this strongly.

If John promised the three universals - the Kingdom, Forgiveness and the outpouring of the Spirit, then Jesus began to demonstrate at least the first two. He declared his action of casting out demons and healing persons was the Kingdom of God coming near, or coming upon them (Matt. 12:28, cf. Luke 10:11, cf. Acts 10:38). However, it was his anointing as Messiah which confronted Satan, and that confrontation was settled principally at the time of the Temptation. Satan and his methods were rejected (cf. Matt. 16:22-23). In Luke 11:14-16 Jesus shows his supremacy of Satan.

However, it is his declared 'programme' at Nazareth in Luke 4:17ff. that angers the people who think him presumptuous. That programme is to 'preach good news to the poor. . . proclaim deliverance to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable (liberation) year of the Lord.' This is the same programme as mentioned in Isaiah 61:1f., with its Messianic connotation.

Christ, as we have said, executes acts of forgiveness of sins, deliverance from demons and demonically caused sickness, as well as other diseases and oppression. In this sense he is practically curing sin, but obviously his task is not to visit every man in this fashion in order to deliver and forgive him. That is why he must go to the Cross, a fact he emphasises in Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33, and the event of the Transfiguration is concerned with this - 'His exodus which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.' We assume then that the defeat of sin and evil powers, and the deliverance of man which is to come through the Kingdom must be sealed so that all who are Christ's people can minister this cure of sin without the actual presence of Messiah Jesus. How then can that defeat of evil powers be sealed?

The answer must lie in the Cross and the Resurrection.

### **(iii) The Promise of the Victory - Cross and Resurrection**

In Acts 17:3 and I Cor. 15:1-4 there is a rationale of the Cross and Resurrection. The early church understood the events of Christ in the light of the O.T. The ideas of many were that Messiah would be a triumphant Prince, close to God Himself, and full of great power and victory. Jesus, in one sense did not fulfil this idea. Moreover he approached his death almost incognito so far as Messianic and Kingly claims were concerned. He forbade evil spirits to disclose that he was Christ the Son of God. He used the less emotive term, 'Son of Man', and although he insisted that he came from the Father, and that his relationship with Him was unique, yet he approached the Cross as his goal, and the Cross was anathema to all.

In Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33, as we have seen, he predicted his death. In Luke 11:21ff he speaks of his coming victory over 'the strong man', i.e. Satan. In John 12:31 he speaks, saying, 'Now is the judgement of this world; now is the prince of this world cast out'. He repeats this theme in John 14: 30-31 and 16:11. In Luke 22:53 he tells his captors, 'Now is your hour and the authority of darkness'. At the last Supper he cheers his followers on, telling them he appoints to them the Kingdom, and taking up the cup promises the fulfilment of Jer. 31:31-34. This is his blood which is shed for the remission of sins. He has said (Mark 10:45) that he is going to give his life a ransom for many. He has also told them he will rise the third day. For the most part they scarcely hear a word he says. They do not wish to hear (Luke 9:44, 45).

### **(iv) The Action and Victory of the Cross**

Now we come to the event of the Cross<sup>3</sup> which we call 'The Cure of Sin'. First we must remember that the actual suffering, and the personal struggle of Jesus against sin, the world, the flesh, and Satan and his forces, is for the most part, hidden from us. We cannot compass it all. All we need to know is revealed. Even so it is difficult for us to look at the Cross because, again, there is our sin. We are emotionally involved. But look we must. He is as the serpent, lifted up, and whoever looks, lives!

#### **(a) Bearing Sin and Becoming Sin**

Hebrews 9:26 says, '...he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin'. This is a definitive remark. It lines up with 'This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.' His first prayer was 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' Whilst this referred primarily to those who crucified him it included others, for the thief was one who received the benefit of the death. I Peter 2:24 indicates that he took our sins upon him and went up on to the cross. It says, 'He bore our sins in his body on the tree'. Sins are a man-thing, and have to be borne in a man-way, for they call for man-suffering. Hence Isaiah 53:4 says, 'He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows'. It also says (verse 6) 'He (God) laid upon him the iniquity of us all.' II Cor. 5:21 says, 'God made him (who knew no sin) to be sin for us'. We do not understand the full mystery of this. We do know he bore the sins and even became them, so that some kind of a transference must have taken place from men to him. I Peter 3:18 has it, 'He suffered, the just for the unjust.' Also in Romans 8:3 Paul says 'God sending His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh for sin (i.e. 'concerning sin' Gk. **peri**) condemned sin in the flesh', i.e. in his flesh or body. The simple conclusion is that if he bore the sin, and became it, and judged it in his flesh, then he has finished it so far as we are concerned, and even so far as it is concerned.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller treatment, see Living Faith Study No. 15 'The Christian Doctrine of the Atonement' (NCPI 1977)

### **(b) Bearing the Wrath: Being the Propitiation**

I John 4:10 says He 'sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' Romans 3:25 says 'God set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.' Propitiation is the averting of the wrath of God from those upon whom it is due. Difficult as it may be for us to conceive, the Messiah bore this wrath. This is shown by the verses just quoted, but even more by seeing that God's holiness (Hab. 1:13) must be vindicated by judgement upon sin. Zechariah 13:7 with Matt. 26:31 (cf. Lam 1:12) shows that Jesus bore the wrath, although we must never see it as God being vindictive or emotionally angry as humans are with one another. God's wrath must be understood in the light of his holiness. Again the curse of the low, as spoken of in Gal. 3:10-13 has to be borne by the sinner. It is really the same as the wrath of God. In Romans 1:18ff. we saw the wrath of God in giving man up, increasingly, to his sin, and so the very effects of cumulative sin and its guilt with attendant misery, fear, pollution, burden, shame, etc. are the actual components of sin which Jesus bears. In one sense then he bears the wrath, in another he takes into himself the sorrows, wounds, and burdens of men, while in yet another sense he takes the heat and fire of guilt - which men feel in their consciences - and absorbs it, taking the pain and shame, until he has borne all, and there is nothing more to bear!

### **(c) Cleansing the Impurity and Pollution**

We saw the promises of cleansing. Matt. 26:28 spoke of the remission of sin, whilst John said he would take away the sin of the world, and the writer of Hebrews that he would put it away. Hebrews 1:3 says, 'when he had made purification for sins...' meaning that he had de-polluted sins. Isaiah 1:18 had said not simply that sins would be neutralised, but be made 'whiter than snow'. Rev. 7:14 speaks of those who had had their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, whilst Hebrews 9:14 says that the blood of Christ cleanses the conscience from dead works. We take it then that he took the pollution of man into himself, and in so doing he had even penetrated 'the secret heart' of Psalm 51 and effected total cleansing. what it cost when the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all could not really be known, but he was the one who 'knew no sin'. His conscience must then have been pure and would suffer with great intensity. what we do know is that the entire pollution of mankind was laid upon him and he wrestled with it, defeating and de-polluting it.

On the basis of the Cross and the Resurrection the N.T. speaks of the cleansing of sinful, repentant men. Thus it speaks of 'your sins may be blotted out' (Acts 3:19), 'washing away your sins' (Acts 22:16), 'you are washed' (I Cor. 6:11), 'cleansed their hearts by faith' (Acts 15:9), 'our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience' (Heb. 10:22).

### **(d) Destroying Guilt; Defeating the Enemies**

Sinful man has many enemies. One of these is the wrath of God. We have seen that in the propitiation Christ bore the wrath. Man is now justified by faith (Rom. 3:21-24, Gal. 16:21, etc). He is delivered from wrath by the Cross and Resurrection. 'Christ died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification'(Rom. 4:25). At the same time Satan has power over man because of his sin I John 5:19 says the whole world lies in the Evil One, and this is repeated in Ephes. 2:1-3. Heb 2:14-15 says sinful man is in fear of death all his life, and so is subject to Satan's bondage. His guilt keeps him there. Likewise in Gal. 1:4 and Col. 2:14-15 it is made clear that man, by his sins (or guilt) is in bondage to the world principalities and powers. Both Satan and these world powers are defeated when Christ, as we have seen above, bears

the guilt of the world. A terrible battle ensues against these enemies. Christ had said, 'Satan is coming' (John 14:30-31), meaning that he was coming to accuse him and make battle. Christ said, 'He has nothing in me, but that the world may know that I love the Father, as the Father has given me commandment, so I do', by which he meant that he would take the accusation which was to be laid upon all men at the Cross. Gal. 1:4 says, 'He gave himself for our sins that he might deliver (rescue) us (up out of) from the present evil age (world-system)'. Col. 2:14-15 shows clearly that when the accusation (guilt) of man's sins was nailed to the Cross, Satan and principalities and their system was defeated. Another way of saying this is John 3:14 ('lifted up as a serpent'), and Gal 6:14 ('the world was crucified').

Man, being justified, is now freed from the accusation of sin. 'There is no condemnation (judgement) to those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:1). Hence Satan may accuse (Rev. 12:9-10) but believers overcome him by the blood of the Lamb, i.e. the death of the Cross.

### **(v) The Fruit of the Cross: The Cure of Sin**

We have scarcely touched upon the mode of his work on the Cross. This is because we cannot really understand what it was for him to bear sin, become sin, take upon him the pollution of the world, bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, receive the stinging accusation of sin from Satan and his powers, and wrestle with them in the places of evil and horror, unknown to anyone as to him, because of his pure conscience, his innate separateness from evil, and his intrinsic holiness. Man cannot understand his love for the Father, his desire to be obedient, and yet to be counted 'as a serpent', to hang defiled and corrupt, to take the intolerable weight and grief of sin, and then - above all, yet with all - to be utterly alienated, as man, from God! Hence the indescribable cry of dereliction. This is the cry of all cries which rings down through the ages, the great 'groaning which cannot be uttered' but which was, fearfully, uttered, and so much so that it will ring for all history in the ears of men. This is the cry which is 'out of the depth' - de profundis! Nevertheless little as we know, the little we do know - because we are men and suffer for our sins - is enough to tell us that his cry, 'It is finished' means that nothing more remains to be suffered for the redemption of man.

We seek, then, to understand how deep is that cure, that cure of sin by the Cross.

#### **(a) He has Put Away Sin. Sin is Defeated.**

Romans 6:1-14, Col. 3:1-5, Gal. 2:20-21 and II Tim. 2:11, among many references tell us that we have died to sin. If it means we have died directly to its power then that is not how it appears, with the saints. The deepest saints have been increasingly conscious of the nature and presence of sin, even within themselves. Romans 7:13ff. is the classical passage which deals with this. whilst a corpse is said to be dead to any form of stimulus and communication, no man is dead in this way to sin, although he may claim to be so. Even temptation would then have ceased. To assert that it is 'by faith' we are dead, or account ourselves dead must make faith a work which is added to the Cross, so that we accomplish by this faith what has not happened intrinsically within us.

Without doubt the following Scriptures not only speak of us as having died, but they also use such tenses (aorist and perfect) as indicate that the event took place at the time of Christ's death:- Romans 6:2, 4, 7, 11, Gal. 2: 19-20,

I Cor. 5:15, Col. 3:3, 11 Tim. 2:11. In what sense, then, have we died? The answer must be, 'legally'. What then do we mean by 'legally'? We mean this: that on the Cross Christ died for our sins, that is he bore the penalty of those sins. No matter what form that bearing took, or the nature of the penalty, that is primarily what he did. Hence Romans 6:7 'He that has died is justified from sin'. That is, man is not crucified (directly) to the power of sin but to the penalty of sin. Christ was never under the power of sin except as its penalty was wrought upon him. When he died to sin he died to its power, thus actually judging sin in his flesh, executing it as he drained it of its guilt-power and resources. The proof that this was total is that he rose from the dead. Hence, 'He was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification

What does this mean to us? It means that his death was accounted to us (11 Cor. 5:14), and so we have died, forever, to sin's condemnation. Also we have risen into a life in which sin now has been shorn of its basic dynamic. What then is its basic dynamic? In I Cor. 15:55-56 Paul says, 'The sting of death is sin, and the dynamic of sin is the law.' He means that we fear death because we have sinned. However, there is no condemnatory death for the believer. The guilt of the law has been destroyed. Sin has power by reason of guilt but since guilt has been erased sin has no essential power. This is the secret the Christian has to discover, or he will remain (though unnecessarily) under the power of sin. Nothing he does gives him power over sin, but what Christ has done provides perfectly for him to be (a) justified from sin, and so (b) no longer under the power of sin. Of course justification from sin is by faith, and he must keep the faith-stance in his continued resistance to sin. Romans 6:1-14 can be summed up thus: When Christ died, we died, and when he was buried, so were we. When he rose so did we. All of this is accounted to us as though we were there. He took the weight of our sin, and the dominion of our death upon him and overcame both sin and death. He died once: he rose once. We too have thus died once, and have risen once, for all. Sin now has no connection with us, no claim over us. Hence when it seeks to dominate our bodies we simply refuse it because the grace of forgiveness, and acquittal has come to us. We are not entangled in the guilt of law. In this sense sin has been cured.

### **(b) Sin Defeated Brings Joyous Willing, Loving Obedience**

Romans 6:13-23 speaks of (a) recognising our emancipation, and (b) living in accordance with it. That is we see sin's link has been broken. We refuse its accusation and (so) power. In act of realisation we consciously submit our members to God, in the service of righteousness. The outcome of this is practical holiness.

There are many examples of obedience motivated by love. In fact that is the only true obedience. 'The love of Christ constrains us', 'If you love me you will keep my commandments', 'We love because he first loved us', 'His commandments are not burdensome'. The enormous release and its equivalent in flood of love equip the new person for obedience. Even, then, when he fails, forgiving love still aids him, 'For where sin abounds grace does much more abound.' This is the real cure of sin.

To this we must add that the power of the law to keep man under condemnation has gone. When a man is under condemnation he will either fall into despair, and a deep sense of inferiority and so into more and more sin, or he will try to 'make up the balance' by doing works. Very quickly he slips into legalism, then hypocrisy, and so becomes open to dreadful forms of sin, since his conscience has been kept from any sight of grace. The Cross brings relief from this legalism-hypocrisy. Luke 16:15 says that anything by which a man

seeks to justify himself is an abomination to God. In the context of unchanging justification the believer can be secure in his fight against sin, and in his positive obedience to the law, the law of Christ, which will never condemn him.

### **(c) Identification with Christ is union With Him**

When we have been baptised into Christ, and receive the benefits of his death and resurrection this cannot happen except we are one with Christ. Baptism makes us one with him, and faith lives in that union with Christ. In this sense all his death and resurrection become ours because he has become ours. The corollary to this is that we have become his in 'obedience from the heart'. Nor is such union possible without the Holy Spirit who has brought his love to us (Rom. 5:5) and by whom Christ dwells in our hearts (Ephes. 3:17). We do not abstract a cure of sin from him, which we utilise, but he is the cure of our sin, and his person brings with it (him) the total acts and benefits of the Cross and Resurrection. Hence sin is cured of its penalty, pollution, and its power within and over us.

### **(d) The Cure of Sin Through the Holy Spirit**

There can be no communication or application of the work of the Cross apart from the Holy Spirit. This is seen in Romans 8:1-3 and Titus 3:3-7. In both passages the work of the Cross is applied by the Spirit. That he is Applicator par excellence is seen in John Chs14-16. He brings into remembrance what Christ has said; he convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement; he leads into all the truth; he glorifies the Son and the Father, together. In Romans 8:1-3 he delivers from law (the law of sin and death) as 'the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'. In Titus 3:3-7 he effects cleansing, regeneration and justification, all of which must flow from the Cross. In I Cor. 6:9-11, (cf. Acts 15:9) he effects cleansing, justification and sanctification, and delivers from former states of idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, thievery, and alcoholism.

Because he reveals love, applies the work of redemption, and brings the believer into sonship (Rom. 8:14-17, Gal 4:4-6) positive obedience is evoked, and sin and the enemies of the person are resisted in the dynamic of the Spirit. Christ also dwells in the believer by the Holy Spirit (Ephes. 3:17), so that the Cross and Resurrection become present, communicated powers by his presence. This further convinces us as to the cure of sin.

Finally, the Spirit enables us to walk out of law-bondage (Gal. 5:16-26). One of the great stimuli from him is that through him we wait, by faith, for the hope of justification. He keeps us assured that justification, which is ultimately eschatological, is also a present fact. Nor is his hope limited to justification, but extends to glorification. In the practical cure of sin hope is the great dynamic which draws us on and helps us to ignore sin, and seek the full experience of God and His Holiness.

### **(e) The Holy Spirit: Continuing Mortification and Vivification**

Colossians 3:1-17 deals with (a) Mortification, and (b) Vivification. We are to mortify every aspect of our being on the basis that already sin has been defeated at the Cross. Sin has no essential power because of this and must be denied. So then we can 'put off' all that is evil. Likewise we must vivify, i.e. 'put on' what is good. In this positive way sin is even further defeated. The same principle obtains in Romans 6. By an act of our (liberated)

wills we submit to the truth and obey. In Romans 8:13 the true principle of mortification of sin and vivification of ourselves is set out:- 'If you through the Spirit do put to death the deeds of the body you shall live'. If we seek to mortify without the Spirit we are seeking to defeat evil in our own powers and this will lead to 'will-worship' (cf. Col. 2:20-23). However, if through the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body, i.e. those proclivities towards fleshly acts, then we shall live.

Of course the Holy Spirit, coming in all his powers of prayer, love, fellowship, gifts, power for proclamation, and the like builds up the climate in which we live and in which we spurn sin, evil and the evil enemies. We fight them with the sword of the Spirit. We walk in the Spirit and defeat the lust of the flesh. In other words the cure of sin, which was sealed at the Cross only comes to us through the application by the Spirit, his mediation of the fruits of the atonement.

### **(vi) Living in the Cure of Sin**

What we have read above should convince us that we are not automatically precluded from sin and sinning. whilst the atonement releases us from the condemnation of sin we yet have to live in faith. The just shall go on living by faith. We fight the fight of faith, not to be justified, but to stand in our justification which has already come to us. The powers of evil are relentless and seek to reclaim their former slaves and captives. We do not have to be cowed by them, and we must not be ignorant of their devices which are many. They seek, time and again to seduce or frighten, but in fact they have no basis. Hence the devil will flee from us (I Peter 5:6-9, James 4:7). Some have been said to have overcome him, rather than he them (I John 2:14). In any case 'greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world', and, 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith'.

We have really dealt with this in the section immediately above ('The Fruit of the Cross: the Cure of Sin'), and so the practical way of sin's defeat is outlined there. This is how we have our daily walk in being justified from sin, and freed from its power. Faith emphasises that there is no need ever to submit to sin, although we do, from time to time. It is not that the cure is not available but that we do not live in the obedience of faith.

### **(a) The Problem of Romans 7:13-25: Indwelling Sin**

What concerns us in this section is the problem of indwelling sin as it is raised in Romans chapter seven, particularly in the verses from 13 to the end of the chapter. How can sin be said to be cured if it is still indwelling man, and especially the believer? Such a cure seems both poor and deficient. Well, we shall see.

In Romans 7:1-12 Paul tells how being under law keeps man in the bondage of sin. He also points out the duplicity of sin in deceiving sinners, by the law, and in fact inciting them to deeper sin. The law does not incite to sin, but sin using it incites man to sin. Paul defends the law itself as being 'holy, and just, and good'. From verse 13 onwards he has the following thesis, which we must understand very well. He says, 'when the law is used by sin to incite sin, is the law sinful? No! In fact by letting sin do this it actually shows up sin as sinful, when sin would otherwise conceal itself. In fact the law is of spiritual quality whereas I (we) am of a fleshly quality. My fleshly quality is this: Sin of itself is stronger than I am of myself. Of myself I

have no good in me, otherwise I would be stronger than sin (of myself.) It is nevertheless true that I hate evil and love the good. I delight in the law of God: I am not (of myself) lawless. In fact I want to do good and desist from evil. However, every time I embark on doing good or resisting evil I find a principle operating within me, the principle of sin which overcomes me. I cannot accomplish what I will to do. I am forced to this conclusion:- I do not volitionally commit sin, but sin, stronger than I, forces my hand. So in one sense it is not I who (from the core) sin, but sin itself. My final conclusion is this: I seek to serve God, and my will is to do good, but of myself I am not stronger than sin. I am forced to do its will.' In this context Paul cries out as a weary battler with sin, 'O wretched (weary, tired) man that I am, who will deliver me from this thing, this body in which sin can effect its will?' He answers that he will be delivered through Christ.

What do we make of all this in regard to the cure of sin? The answer is this, 'Sin, on any reckoning, of itself is stronger than man, even redeemed man.' Man can only be true man, even redeemed man when he is in total contingency upon God. Never, of himself can he effect moral accomplishment, or defeat of evil. We have seen that 'if you, through the Spirit put to death', etc. Paul has simply been examining what he is 'of himself'. However the true believer is in perpetual need of living contingently. If he does that, then sin cannot possibly have power over him. Since its guilt is vanquished, Christ is present, and the Spirit enables powerfully he can overcome indwelling sin. It is rendered useless where the atonement effects its power through the Spirit, and where Christ is present and obeyed as Lord.

Once we discover the 'Biblical anthropology' of the redeemed person we will not expect to accomplish anything in our own (imagined) powers, but will overcome through the Spirit and the Word. We will also recognise that in this state of contingency we can refuse Satan, put to death the deeds of the body, put on the true things of new living, and refuse the domination of sin within our bodies. This does not of course explain the cause of indwelling sin in the believer. Nor does Paul explain. He simply says, 'I find a principle within me...' He accepts it as a fact of life. He is primarily concerned to defeat the principle. On the one hand he says only death will resolve the dilemma, for the resurrected body will have no indwelling sin. On the other hand he points to the power of the atonement and the Spirit to overcome that sin even while it dwells in him.

We could add our observation: 'whenever man fights sin he gains experience, moral muscularity and maturity.' In fact this battle is part of the means of habituating his will against sin, and aiding him in personal growth and, ultimately, maturity.

### **(b) Problems We Create Against the Cure of Sin**

If we would accept with simple faith the revealed truths concerning sin's cure then we could proceed to live in them. However, we ourselves seek to limit the extent and power of the completed work of Christ, as also that of his indwelling Spirit.

#### **1. The Problem of Forgiveness and Justification**

By faith we know we are forgiven and justified, and we must live in this faith. We do not see these things by sight. Hence the daily battle of faith. However, many Christians refuse to believe that God's forgiveness is total. This being the case they are limiting both the grace and the love of God. This

has the effect of lessening their motivation for, and powers of, obedience. Because they will not see the total work of the Cross, they lack a total clearance from sin's guilt, its pollution, its power. Hence their cure is always lacking. They become perpetual spiritual hypochondriacs, always haunting the counsellor, always seeking some new experience, some fresh, but temporary assurance that they are forgiven.

There is an even deeper problem. The person who says he can believe (technically) that God has forgiven, but yet cannot forgive himself is a person who really has not accepted the forgiveness of God. Behind this he may have other problems. He may not want to forgive some other person, and knows that receiving God's forgiveness he will then be obligated to forgive others. On the other hand it could be sheer ignorance of the magnitude of God's love and forgiveness. Whatever it is, sin's cure has yet to be experienced.

## 2. The Problem of Concocted Amnesia

In II Peter 1:3-9 we are given the picture of (a) a man who lives fully in his new life, and working progressively becomes fruitful and rich in the knowledge he has gained, and (b) a man who has 'forgotten he was cleansed from his old sins'. The Greek verb indicates he has deliberately forgotten. He has a 'concocted amnesia'. His case is clear. Total forgiveness commits one to total obedience, and total forgiveness, that is being forgiven he must forgive. In order to dull his sense of obligation, this man deliberately forgets his sins were totally purged.

This case is clear enough, but even more devastating is the Christian who is a clinical case, always wanting to have memories healed, and seeking various new therapies. Because many elements affect this person we will discuss these below, but here we make the observation that the duplicity of demanding constant attention to certain sins of the past is sheer and unadulterated disbelief in the total work of the Cross!

## 3. The Problem of Self-Pity, and Self-Justification

We are now led back to our discussion on the problem of the origin of sin within us. We saw that many blame heredity and environment, including circumstances for the incidence of sin in their lives. This is a misunderstanding of the doctrine of creation. Created in the image of God man is expected to rule in his world, rising above every difficulty. Of course this is in contingency upon God. Not to be contingent is to be sinful, anyway. We saw that there are powerful influences wrought by heredity and environment, and that circumstances are often very pressing, but that is not the point. Man can, if he will, triumph every time, at least in his spirit. Ezekiel 18 makes it clear that his hand is not forced to sin. He sins of his own volition.

What is often the truth is that children rebel against authority. They react against parents. They rationalise the actions of their parents (whether the parents be right or wrong) as being hurtful, and retaining these hurts, they develop self-pity. Such self-pity can develop in any relationship. These persons often justify themselves for their attitude, saying, 'It's only human. One can stand just so much...', etc. Also they argue that God has not managed His world very well, and they are the victims of suffering, injustice etc. whatever the case, sin will always persist and have an excellent breeding ground when people will not become responsible for their own sins, negative reactions, hurts and so on. For this reason we must call self-pity sin. Also retaining hurt and developing it is a sin. Refusing to accept persons as they are is a sin, even though one does not have to condone the evil of another, in

any form. When we recognise that 'in all things God is working for the good of those who love Him' then nothing can happen which is not, in the ultimate, for good. Therefore there is no ground either for hurt or bitterness. We are forgiven, and we must forgive.

#### 4. Forgiveness the key to sin's Cure

We come now to our conclusion, not only of this particular section of our study, but our entire study. The venom of hatred in man, against God, others, his universe and himself stems from his own sin, and is indeed sin itself. when God forgives man He forgives on the basis of the Cross, and that forgiveness is total. when we realise that then we know the past has been cleansed, totally and for ever. If we have any doubt about the completeness of God's forgiveness we will have doubt about the entire erasing (cleansing) of our past sins. If we retain any in our thinking then we are despising the grace of the Cross and the Love of God. Our forgiveness of others will always be deficient.

One problem that arises is our failure to see that we need to be forgiven for the sins of reacting negatively to others, for being hurt, for nurturing our hurts and enlarging them. Whilst we may be prepared to forgive others, there will be this large area that lies unrealised in forgiveness. Hence we will never feel free in that area. We will always be uneasy regarding it, and will seek to justify ourselves concerning it, and this mainly by accusing those who hurt us.

Fuel is added to this miserable fire when people tell us we have been wounded by traumatic happenings. Being made in the image of God we are expected to respond positively to even the worst of experiences, and we should. To be pitied for them adds fuel to the fires of our self-pity. The corrective therapy given can never, by nature of the case, be successful. One good wholesome act of repentance, confession and forgiveness (of others) will restore our health. We will be finished with the unwholesome load of our self-pity, self-excuses, and moral hypochondria. We will be cured, healthy, and ready to share the forgiveness of God with needy mankind.

#### **(vii) The Ultimate Cure of Sin**

We have seen that the Cross and Resurrection, being the works of triumph of Messiah, defeated sin, the world powers, the world, and Satan. In addition the wrath of God is no longer a threat to man when he believes. His fleshly lusts find their doom in that Cross, and his conscience is stilled and at peace. Death has no terrors for him. Hence, in this sense sin is cured.

At the same time man can only have that measure of freedom which comes from living by faith. He recognises his strength lies only in contingency, in abiding, and so his battle is to reject the temptation to non-contingency. He submits himself to the Almighty hand of God and defeats Satan. Yet all is by faith. For this reason his hope is greatly stimulated by the assurances of prophecy that at the end evil will be destroyed, for ever.

The Book of the Revelation confirms him in this hope. He sees Christ crucified open the seven seals of the book and proceed, through his Lordship, to exercise authority and to bring the kingdoms of the world to heel. Finally all forms of evil, Satan, the beast, the false prophets, evil spirit, and unclean and impenitent men are destroyed in the lake of fire. The new heavens and the new earth appear, and in them 'dwelleth only righteousness' (II Peter 3:10ff.),

whilst 'nothing unclean shall enter' the holy city, the new Jerusalem, in fact the entirety of the new heavens and the new earth, 'nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood'. The eternal heavens and earth, then, shall be entirely pure, and the family of God will enter into the 'glorious liberty of the children of God.'

Sin will have been cured forever, and whatever relates to sin, or by which sin, in the past, has bred. The body of glory which the saints shall wear shall have no indwelling sin. God has promised in the now-time 'I will forgive their sins, and their iniquities I will remember no more', and in the then-time we will, ourselves, not remember.

Sin's cure will have been, finally, effected.

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