

The Implications of Sin
A Lenten Meditation
The Third Sunday in Lent

The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. 1 Cor. 15:56

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity...(Ps. 51:5a)

Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. 1 Jn. 3:4

The soul that sinneth, it shall die... Ezek. 18:20a

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin... 2 Cor. 5:21a

Lent throws us back upon a universal theme, one from which we would make glad escape, if we possibly could. It is the theme of human sin. It appears and reappears tirelessly, relentlessly, throughout Holy Scripture. It spoils the bliss of every idyllic scene. No effort can expunge it from our midst though we try our hardest to name it by another name, dress it in different clothes, or slap on it the imprimatur of universal, popular approval. It is like some dreaded, awful odor in the home, arising with distressing persistence just when we thought we had thoroughly purged the house of every bit of rotting garbage that might embarrass us on some evening when guests are expected. Like Adam and Eve, we go to ridiculous, absurd extremes to cover it. It clings and sticks to us worse than roofing tar, and defies every effort we make to wash it off, or even to flee desperately from it. It makes wise men and intellectuals and sophisticates into fools and clowns. It makes ugly and misshapen the rich and famous and glamorous. Left unchecked, it is the last laugh to all of the pomp and glory and accomplishment of man. It mocks and jeers and laughs at our coveted moments of greatest achievement. It damns souls and condemns civilizations, cities, and nations, and writes countless epitaphs.

It is indeed the desperate mission of a lawless age to make sure that sin is renamed, reconfigured, repackaged, and reintroduced in forms that make it appear to be the exact opposite of what it is. This is one principal reason why the duty of believers in such times is to be absolutely sure of how God defines that which is being so perniciously redefined. We run to dictionaries, don't we, when the meaning for words is in dispute? We consult sources of appropriate standards when there is doubt about measurements, or weights, or tolerances. Strange, is it not, that it is only when it comes to sin --identifying it confidently, naming it accurately-- that a great roar of objection is raised about the authenticity or authority of a standard to refer to for the task: "Well, the Bible is dated. Things have evolved. The text was applicable in its own day, but is no longer." And even if the standard can't be easily impugned, then the standard-bearer can, very handily:

“You Christians don’t walk your talk. Look at the scandals of the church. What right do you have to tell anyone else what’s right and wrong?” This last argument hits us all where it hurts. We know we are far from perfect. And we groan at every new revelation of wicked acts committed by those whom we thought --and the world had every right to think-- were holy. And so we are shamed into silence, which is the precise aim of those who seek to sin without restraint. Sin, it almost seems, is left to have the final word.

All of the above is offered to urge us to come to terms with this thing called sin. In doing so, we will not only better deal with it personally, but also free ourselves from the modern conspiracy to relativize it in order to escape its ultimate consequence: divine punishment. Most importantly, we will bow in adoration and worship of the God who has provided the only possible escape from its power and presence and its awful, ultimate effect upon the soul.

Listen to the words that are against us: *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...* (Rom. 3:23). *For all have sinned...; For all have sinned!* How often need we repeat those words! They apply to us *all*. Do we say this of our own souls? This is why our Book of Common Prayer provides us with such immediate and ready assistance. If we honestly acknowledge our sins, their power over us, and their frequency, we are driven straightway to our only hope: “Let us humbly confess our sins unto Almighty God...We have erred, and strayed... We have offended... We have left undone... we have done those things which we ought not to have done...”, and onward goes the confession. Over and over we say these words. Never does a day go by when we aren’t in urgent need of them. Though all the world seek freedom from the power and judgment of sin through ignoring it, or justifying it, or misrepresenting it, we believers avail ourselves of the only way out: “confession unto Almighty God”. Oh how simple and easy it is, even though it be profoundly humiliating! It is the sure way of escape, precisely because God Himself has supplied the Key. We look to the payment the Lord Jesus Christ made for our sins by His death upon the Cross. It is freely and generously provided, and always available. Its effectiveness is guaranteed. Had we searched the whole world over and looked everywhere for a thousand lifetimes we would never have found it, other than in the Cross of Christ.

Our desperate condition as prisoners of sin is seen in the desperate measures that God undertook to address it. Were it an easy thing, He would have chosen an easier means. But who among us would have imagined the solution? Those enemies to which the world is commonly subject can be addressed predictably. Nations raise up armies to counter invaders. Medicines are prescribed to drive out the effects of illnesses. Every power of the ingenuity of men has been summoned to effectively address a host of opponents to health, comfort, and happiness, and men imagine that the day will arrive when none whatsoever will remain. But “what will wash away my sin?” I cannot outrun it. It is as much a part of me as I am of myself. It will require an agency

of some sort with an efficacy that is unknown anywhere. The death of the Son of God. The blood of His Cross. O, how much power has the crucifixion of Christ provided us!

As we deal with this thing called sin, then, in the best and healthiest manner that could possibly be provided, facing its reality with all honesty, and traveling over and over and over the dusty trail to the altar of forgiveness, until that worn and beaten path becomes a thing of holy familiarity to us, a transformation will surely take place. We will be changed into certified, tried and true, thoroughly real, and thoroughly qualified bearers of the Good News into this darkened world which is reeling crazily about under “sin’s dread sway”, as a hymn puts it. To those who hate the light, who love sin, and serve the devil, our presence will be a hated and resented reproach. But to those who are crying out to God under the terrible, relentless whiplash of sin, who have been served up the treacherous lie that sin is something good and right and desirable, to them we can hold out with the joy and confidence born out of our own testimony that there is a Way Out.

We can never hope to proclaim the Gospel, however, if we do not count ourselves as sinners among sinners, and judge ourselves always in just as urgent need of the Gospel as those to whom we are sent. They will immediately know and sense that we consider ourselves as one of them. They will both trust us, and the message we bear.

Let us pray:

O God, grant that we who claim knowledge of Thee might never lose that gratitude which is the only proper response to the great kindness Thou hast shown us through the forgiveness of sins provided us by our Lord Jesus Christ. And may such gratitude compel us in love to seek to bring others to the knowledge of that same forgiveness.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.