

3. All Have Sinned (3Q 2010—Redemption in Romans)

Biblical material: *Romans 3:1-18, 23; Rom. 1:16, 17, 22-32; 2:1-10, 17-23.*

Quotes

- Sin is not hurtful because it is forbidden, but it is forbidden because it is hurtful. *Benjamin Franklin*
- Other men's sins are before our eyes; our own are behind our backs. *Seneca*
- Men are not punished for their sins, but by them. *Elbert Hubbard*
- Every sin brings its punishment with it. *Romanian proverb*
- Sins become more subtle as you grow older: you commit sins of despair rather than lust. *Piers Paul Read*
- Sin is whatever obscures the soul. *Andre Gide*

Questions

Why is it so important to have a correct concept of what sin really is? How do we stop a discussion of sin and its consequences from becoming depressing? How are we held accountable by God? In the context of the great controversy, who will be vindicated? What is our role in all of this? How does the law help?

Bible discussion

The discussion continues on the relative aspects of Jew and foreigner. Paul points out the benefits that God's people have had, though they were not always trustworthy. However this does not reflect badly on God, as he makes clear (3:1-3). In fact God is vindicated even so (3:4), the main theme of the great controversy. Nor is there any benefit to sin, as if this were to add to the glory of God (3:5-8). In the end, no one is better than anyone else in terms of being sinners. Paul then uses a chain of Old Testament texts to make this point—that we are all subject to sin, and none of us really does good. Ultimately this leads to a rejection of God (3:5-18). The conclusion is that “everyone has sinned and we miss out on God's glorious presence.” (3:23 FBV).

Comment

What is sin? We speak so often about this subject, but what really do we mean? How do you define sin? Strange, isn't it? We can know in our minds what we mean, but often it's so hard to describe and define. Sin is the transgression of the law. That's the commonest definition. Does that mean that if we are in ignorance of the law then we are not sinning? Clearly not: Paul reminds us that sin remains sin even though we may not be aware of it. So we need to revise our definition a little.

Sin is not just a conscious breaking of some specific law. We may well be transgressing (breaking) laws we don't even know about. Does that make us innocent? Not at all. So then, what if we live exemplary lives, very Pharisaical in our observance of each law in minute detail—does that make us sinless? Again obviously not.

What is sin? Another answer is given in the NIV translation of 1 John 3:4: “Sin is lawlessness.” When that word is mentioned, what do you immediately think of? Lawless? Outlaws...lawless frontier towns. Bandits. Westerns. The only ‘law’ the law of

the gun, the fastest gun in the West and so on. Why were they lawless? Because they chose to go out and break the law? Or because of their inner attitude? Lawlessness speaks of an inner attitude of mind, a way of thinking and living that is out of harmony with the standard of conduct, behavior and living that the law expresses.

Romans 14:13 gives us another definition: “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” A hard text, but when you break it down it’s not so difficult. What’s faith? Faith is trusting God, having confidence in him. So what is the opposite of faith? Distrust, not having confidence in God. So this definition comes out something like: sin is not trusting God. Distrusting God to work in your life. Not believing what he says. Question: when did Eve sin first—when she took and ate the fruit, or when she trusted the Devil and distrusted God as the Devil said “You shall not surely die”? That’s the very heart of sin: an attitude that is distrustful of God, suspicious of him; one that says: “God, I may believe in you, I may even come to church regularly and profess to be a good Christian, but I don’t really want your help, I don’t trust you to be with me in my life.”

Sin is an antagonistic attitude, a spirit of rebellion that separates us from God. We have gone away from God, built a barricade between us and him, and like spoilt children refuse to come back to the only One who can really help us. So in desperation God broke through that barricade and came to us, to ask us to allow him to take us home again.

Our spirit of self-centered rebellion is changed by our loving God, if we allow him. We are remade by God into a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come! How? Through God’s action of bringing us back together with Him—his reconciliation. He reconciled us to him, not counting our sinful attitude against us, remaking us into his goodness.

Ellen White Comments

Where once was written only the character of God, the knowledge of good, was now written also the character of Satan, the knowledge of evil. From nature, which now revealed the knowledge of good and evil, man was continually to receive warning as to the results of sin. {CG 46}

With patient, unselfish effort the Saviour sought to reach man in his fallen condition, and to rescue him from the consequences of sin. His disciples, who are the teachers of His word, should closely imitate their great Exemplar. {GW 191}

Even when it was decided that he could no longer remain in Heaven, infinite wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since the service of love can alone be acceptable to God, the allegiance of his creatures must rest upon a conviction of his justice and benevolence. The inhabitants of Heaven and of other worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice and mercy of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted from existence, they would have served God from fear, rather than from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated. Evil must be permitted to come to maturity. For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, Satan must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of his law might forever be placed beyond all question. {GC88 498-9}