THE HERALDS OF TRUTH

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THE TRUE NATURE OF SIN Reuben Warjri



eprosy was very common Bible times. The that the reason scriptures talk so much about it is because its incurable and fatal nature reminiscent of sin's

loathsome and destructive power. Anyone who was held under its dominion, was looked upon as an outcast in society and is forced to leave the comfort of family and friends to dwell with fellow lepers. It enslaved its victim with such might that it took a miracle of unimaginable proportions to free him from its clutches.

Such is the power with which sin has enslaved the human race that the apostle Paul was compelled to admit that it has gained such mastery over his will so as to prevent him from doing that which he knows is a good and right thing to do. (Read Romans 7). For this reason, Paul exclaims, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24)

To find an antidote to any disease, no matter how deadly, a thorough investigation has to be undertaken to understand its origins, behavioural patterns and symptoms. Until such investigation is carried out, one cannot hope to find a cure to the disease.

Similarly, we have to search from scripture the correct and accurate definition of sin and only then can we discover the true solution for the problem.

How Sin Entered the World

How did the entire world come under the power of sin? The word of God clearly states that by the sin of Adam, sin made its entry into the world and all man have sinned as a result of this.

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:" (Romans 5:12)

But why is it that the sin of one man has such power to cause all mankind to sin and fall short of God's glory? The answer to this lies in the principle of inheritance. God gave one life and that life was in Adam. The children of Adam, from one generation to another, were meant to receive this same life from their parents by way of inheritance. But because Adam had sinned, the eternal, unblemished life of the Father was taken away and man possessed the physical life that is polluted by sin. Now it is this sinful life of Adam that mankind inherits. In other words.

Contents	
The True Nature of Sin	1
Faith is the Victory	5

man inherited the sinful nature from his parents. This principle is clearly spelled out in the Bible.

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51:5)

A State of Being

The above passage reveals that at the very moment a child is conceived, it is sinful. Before it has limbs to perform works of iniquity; before it has a mouth and tongue to speak lies; or even a brain to think and perceive what sin is, it is already sinful. Sin is a nature that is inherited and inbuilt in man. It is something that has been handed down from generation to generation, beginning with Adam and Eve. Therefore, no one needs to be taught to commit sin as it is part and parcel of man's biological makeup.

Because of this knowledge now in hand, it is reasonable to say that the definition of sin is not limited only to that which is held dogmatically by most people, which is the transgression of the law. (Read 1 John 3:4). Contrary to popular belief, sin is a state of being, rather than an act of breaking the law.

The Temptation of Christ

Consider the first temptation with which Christ was tempted when he was led into the wilderness.

"And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." (Matthew 4:3)

What does the turning of stones into bread and satisfying one's hunger have to do with breaking any of the commandments, as we know them? The devil did not tempt Christ to turn away from the worship of the true God or even to break the Sabbath. He did not ask Him to commit adultery or murder and bear false witness. Yet if Christ had merely turned the stones into bread and quenched His hunger, He would have sinned! Here, we do not see the indication that sin is solely transgression of the law.

The Case of Adam and Eve

Apart from Christ, every human being was born with a sinful nature. But this principle cannot be applied to Adam and Eve because they came into existence through the process of creation. Initially, sin did not mar their nature because they were perfect and they were also the temple of the living God. The will of God was what ruled their conscience for as long as they chose to remain this way.

People who say that sin is ONLY the transgression of the law, argue that our first parents became sinners committed sin the very moment they ate the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. If this argument were true, then it stands to reason that it is God or His will that prompted them to transgress His law. This view is absurd because if God's will was what governed their thoughts and perceptions from the very beginning, it is logical to conclude that it was God who caused Eve to change her mind about how she viewed the forbidden fruit because just prior to eating the fruit, she was still one with God. The limited understanding of the nature of sin gives allowance to the notion that God can be

tempted and He should be held accountable for the consequences that we now face. Isn't this exactly what Satan wants the world to believe? Does he not say that God is the reason why bad things happen? But the Bible clearly states that He cannot be tempted. (James 1:13)

So, if Adam and Eve functioned perfectly under God's will, whose will governed their thoughts that led them to eat the forbidden fruit? This dilemma can be solved or understood when we go back to the conversation that took place between Satan and Eve.

"Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." (Genesis 3:1-6)

At the start of this conversation, Eve strongly believed what God told her about the consequence of eating the forbidden fruit to be the truth by explicitly stating that she would die if she chose to disobey. Her initial reply indicates that she does not have the willingness to go against God's will. But Satan convinced her to go against her conscience by misrepresenting God's character. When he stated that the fruit had in it the properties to open her eyes and be like God Himself, he was implying that God had all along withheld from her and her husband better things. These better things included the ability to enter into a higher level of existence and enabled man to be like gods, knowing good and evil. And to keep her from eating the fruit, God fabricated a lie by saying that anyone who ate it would eventually die.

The Fruit of Unbelief

The sophistry of Satan was enough to cause Eve to lose faith in God. She now believed the words of the serpent and began to view God as a tyrant and a liar. She therefore, desired independence from her Creator's will and wished to be a law unto herself. God who does not force His way into others, did not remain in the heart which no longer wished to her retain Him. Therefore. unbelief eventually caused her to separate herself from Him who created her.

Outside of God, Eve's will was what ruled her conscience and it now caused her to see that the forbidden fruit was good to eat. She was now bent on committing an act that was contrary to the will of God. This will is also known as " the carnal mind," which is not subject to the will of God.

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." (Romans 8:7)

Sin as a Problem from Within

The eating of the forbidden fruit is not sin in and of itself, but it is merely a visible manifestation that God was no longer in control. This precept is outlined in the words of Jesus.

"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." (Matthew 12:35)

What the Saviour is saying is that, no one can produce good works if the nature of his heart is not good. On the surface, the passage seems to support the idea that one is capable, on his own, to have a good heart and therefore produce good works. But remember that when the rich young man addressed Jesus as the "good Master", Jesus' reply was, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God:" (Matthew 19:17) This does not mean that Christ is not good, but the reason that He chose to reply in this fashion was because the rich young man did not see Jesus as the Saviour but took Him as one of the prophets. Based on this understanding, Jesus was implying that if, to the young man, He was a mere mortal, then know this that the only person who should rightly be called good is one who is God or who possesses divinity. A mere mortal cannot be good and remain good outside of God.

The Wages of Sin

The carnal nature that now took captive of Eve prompted her to eat the forbidden fruit. However, the eating the fruit did not seem to produce the immediate and instantaneous result of death. But unbeknown to Eve, death had already taken hold of her before she even ate the fruit because as a result of the separation from God, she is cut off from the ONLY Source of life. This death is more of a spiritual nature than a physical one. Spiritually, she now lacked the spiritual discernment that she was already a sinner and in need of a Saviour. She was misled to think that death after all was nothing but a ploy by God to cut her off from acquiring the "benefits" that the forbidden fruit had to give her. Encouraged by the "lack" of visible evidences to validate the warning of God, she immediately rushed to her husband to tell him about her discovery.

I believe that when Adam listened to the words of Eve about her encounter with the serpent and seeing that she was alive and well even after she had eaten the fruit, he too believed the words of the serpent that God should not be trusted. This led him to cease believing in God and his unbelief led him to separate himself from Him who alone is good. This was what caused him to transgress God's law. This in turn produced undesirable consequences, the greatest of them being death.

Curses or Consequences?

At this junction, I feel that it is necessary to clear the prevailing misconceptions that popular idea has it that, as a result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, God was filled with wrath and therefore He put them and the entire human race under a curse. Though the story of the fall of man in Genesis 3 seems to support this notion, what many do not know and understand is that the "curses" pronounced by God in the garden of Eden were but the consequences of their

separation from Him who is the only Source of life and goodness.

Death, for inevitable instance, is considering the fact that our first parents have broken free from the Fountain of life. And as I have also pointed out that goodness cannot exist outside of God, it is absurd to think that goodness should even be expected when God is no longer in control of our lives. Nevertheless, in the midst of the prevailing hopelessness, God who abounds in graciousness and love, continues to shower some of the goodness that can still be seen in some of the things that surround us. But most of all, He came to the garden to announce the coming of the Redeemer to redeem us from our sins. Many individuals fail to recognise this part of the story but rather choose to focus on the curses which are but the consequences or the curses of sin.

On account of this truth, it stands to reason that sin, as a state of being, is a condition of being separated from God. And all humans were conceived and born with this same condition. The words of the Psalmist once again confirms this teaching for us.

"The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." (Psalm 58:3)

To be estranged means to be isolated from something or someone. In this case, babies are estranged from God from the moment they were conceived.

Therefore, in dealing with the problem of sin, many have taken the wrong steps. They think that the mere correction of outward behaviour is the solution to the problem. This has led them to a zero percent success rate. How then shall we deal with the problem of sin and who or what is the solution to this problem? This issue is dealt with in the next article, *Faith is the Victory*.

FAITH IS THE VICTORY Reuben Warjri

In the above article, *The True Nature* of Sin, we have established from scripture that sin is not limited to the definition found in 1 John 3:4, where it says that sin is the transgression of the law. As a matter of fact, sin is a state of being separated from God rather than a mere action that contradicts the precepts of His law. A more careful analysis of the aforesaid article will reveal that the real reason that caused man to sin is unbelief or lack of faith. This led to separation from God which left man to his own will. This will is said to be carnal and therefore, it is always at variance to God's



will and His law. In other words, when man is left to exercise his own will, he eventually chooses to do things that are against the law or to transgress God's law. As a result, man is reaping the bad consequences of the choice(s) he made. This picture can be summarised by the following table where these steps are arranged in a chronological order.

Unbelief (faithlessness)
Separation (sinner)
Self-will (carnal)
Sinful actions (transgression of the law)
Bad Consequences (curses)

The problem of sin, as can be seen from this aspect, does not begin at the fourth step which is, sinful actions. Our actions are but visible evidences that we are sinners. The problem starts from the very beginning with unbelief or lack of faith.

Now that we know what caused sin to take hold of the human race and how it manifests itself, we need to ask ourselves, "Who or what is the solution to this problem?" I am sure that by now most of you already know what the answer to this question is and there is no disputing the fact that Christ and only He alone is the solution to this problem. The Bible also does not contradict this teaching because in Romans chapter seven, when Paul asked the question, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24), that is to say, "Who shall deliver me from sin", he immediately gave the answer in the very next verse by saying, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 7:25). What Paul is saying is that the solution comes to us through Christ and it is provided to us by God as a gift. Note what Paul says in Romans 6:23.

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ." (Romans 6:23)

While it is easy to say that Christ is the solution to sin, the question that still lingers in the minds of many Christians or even non-Christians is, "How or in what way is Jesus the solution to sin?" This is what we are going to look at in this study. And I am going to begin at the very root of the problem, which is unbelief.

If you recall, I mentioned that sin is part of man's biological makeup and that every human being was conceived and born with sin. To put it in another way, each human was born with a condition that is isolated from God and possesses an unbelieving spirit. This is spelled out so emphatically in Psalms 51:5 and Psalms 58:3. Knowing this, it is imperatively clear that no one is born with the awareness that God exists. It is only when we are told and taught that there is a Supreme Being who created all things, that we become aware of His existence.

The children of Israel serve as a good example and an evidence to illustrate what I am trying to say. This nation spent the first four hundred years of its existence in Egypt. While they were there, they were constantly surrounded by the culture and traditions of the Egyptians who did not worship or even had the knowledge about the God of the Bible. I am sure that the Egyptians' way of life had such a strong and an enduring effect on the minds and lives of the Israelites that, with the exception of a few households, they too were devoid of the knowledge about the God who chose them as His own. That is why, at the foot of mount Sinai the Israelites were so easily led to carve a golden image of a calf and worshipped it. This form of worship was prevalent in ancient Egypt at the time. For this reason, God chose a

prophet among them who not only delivered them from bondage but also constantly turned their hearts to the true and living God. The plagues that struck the land of Egypt also served as evidence to the Jews and the Egyptians that there is a God. In fact, God's chosen people had, for a long time, no knowledge about the God of their forefathers – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The condition of the Israelites in Moses's day is a reflection of the condition that exists today. We live in a world that does not know or is even sure whether God exists or not. Note what the Psalms say.

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Psalms 14:1-3)

According to this passage, there is a widespread ignorance of God and His ways. This comes from the fact that mankind refrains from seeking Him. The Bible says that fools do not acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Divine Being despise knowledge they and also (Proverbs 1:22). This knowledge is mostly referred to the knowledge about God which is also termed as "the fear of the LORD", as can be found in the book of Proverbs.

"For they hated <u>knowledge</u>, and did not choose <u>the fear of the LORD</u>:" (Proverbs 1:29)

"Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God." (Proverbs 2:5)

In these two passages, we see a classic example of parallelism which was commonly used by the old testament writers to say one thing and then say the same thing again, but in different words, to explain the meaning of what the first saying is.

It is evidently clear that the knowledge of God is lacking in our society and therefore, unbelief in God is so widespread and it is bound to multiply with time. And how can you put your faith in something or someone you do not even know exists. Impossible. Paul has expressed this matter so unequivocally and also gives a solution to deal with this problem.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the LORD shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher... So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:13,14,17)

Truly, faith in God can once again be revived if the world hears the teachings of His word. But why the word of God? Is it only because it's authors were inspired by Him as they were writing it? While this is true on the one hand, on the other hand, what makes this book so special is that it centres around one man, and that is Jesus.

"[Ye] search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me." (John 5:39)

Christ came to reveal the Father to this world and in doing so, He removes away the misconceptions that have piled over the centuries as a result of the lies that Satan tells the world about God. We no longer have a physical contact with our Saviour but the biographical account of Jesus as found in the Bible talks about what He did and taught. Therefore, its pages reveal the true character of God through the life of His Son. This character is also found in the Son, for the Bible teaches us that Jesus is in the "express image" of the Father's person. (Hebrews 1:3). When the unbelieving world beholds the glory of the Father in the Son, through the inspired words of scripture, the power of the Holy Spirit, which is Christ, draws their hearts to shed its unbelieving spirit and approach God with faith.

Our first parents fled and hid themselves from God for fear that He might come and punish them for their wrong acts. This fear was also the result of the distortion of God's character by Satan. But to their surprise, God came to the garden to reveal His unchanging love for them by promising them to send His only begotten Son to redeem them from sin. This promise was constantly reminded by God through the prophets to all the old testament folks. He remained true to His word and when "the fullness of the time was come, God sent His Son" to this world. (Galatians 4:4). He did this to show His love for us.

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might be saved through Him." (1 John 4:9)

Truly, the purpose of sending His Son was that by or through Him we shall be saved. God did not send His Son to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him. (John 3:17) Our part is to believe in what Christ has done for us. It is our unbelief that condemns us. That is why the Bible says, "He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:18)

At the time when the world is at enmity with God, God reconciled the world unto Himself through the death of His Son. (Romans 5:10). What this tells me is that, long before I knew I needed forgiveness; long before I knew I needed to be reconciled unto Him, God had already done that for me through His Son. This is the truth for it is impossible for God to lie. If this cannot break the chains of unbelief in God, I do not know what is.

Now, when a person believes, the next step is to be united to God. I am sure that God longs for us to be one with Him. But even if the sinner and God mutually agree to be one, the problem is that no one can go to Him directly. Once again, it is Christ who steps in and provides the solution to the problem.

The Bible says that we have access to the Father through Jesus by one Spirit only. (Ephesians 2:18). This Spirit is the Spirit of the Son which is sent by the Father unto us. (Galatians 4:6). This teaching is summed up by Jesus Christ Himself, in John 14.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." (John 14:6)

In what manner is Christ the only way that connects us to the Father? The answer to this is understood from the fact that Christ was the first and the only human being, after the fall, to be truly one with God. He spells this out for us in the following verse where He lays emphasis on His unity with the Father.

"Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me." (John 14:10-11)

Apart from being the only human who is truly one with God, Jesus is and still is the only human being who can give this life to any who believes and yearns for eternal life. Christ does this by dwelling in us through His Spirit. This is why Paul says that the hope of glory is "Christ in you." (Colossians 1:27). In this process, the sinner becomes a saint, not by his own merits or righteousness, but by the righteous life of Christ that covers him.

The third problem of sin in the list is the self-willed attitude which is also known as the carnal nature. Paul describes this nature as an enemy of God and it cannot be subject to His law and will. (Romans 8:7). It is a nature that is a law unto itself and longs to be that way. But with Christ dwelling in the temple of the heart, the will is slowly and surely put under the control of God's will.

How is this possible? By nature, Christ possesses the character that loves to do

God's will. Note what He declared concerning Himself to the disciples.

"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." (John 4:34)

It is in Christ's best interest to do the will of the Father because it pleases Him to please the Father.

This is also true when things are not going well. When He found Himself in trying circumstances, Jesus did not fail to be directed by God's will. For instance, in the garden of Gethsemane, even though He wished that the problem of sin could have been dealt with in another way and prayed to the Father that if it were possible, He would not have to go through the experience that He was about to go through, He ended His prayer with the words, "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt." (Mark 14:36)

Christ implants this same character in the heart of the believer who surrenders his heart to His will, making it possible for the repentant sinner to submit himself under God's guidance.

Additionally, when we surrender our life to the Saviour, His life becomes our life (Colossians 3:4). Our will and our life are lost in His will and in His life. Just as Christ allowed God to take control of His life in trying circumstances, His strength of character will prompt us to allow God to guide us when we are put in similar circumstances and we will avoid, by our own efforts, to find a way out of difficult situations. This would not have been possible if we did not believe.

If the will is governed by God, it naturally follows that this will manifests itself in the words and actions of the believer. The heavenly Father desires that we produce good works that by them we may glorify Him as our God and Creator. Once again, this is made possible because God dwells in us and He works in us to do the things that please Him.

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13)

Since we say that Christ is the solution to all the problems of sin, where does He fit into this picture? It is true, according to Philippians 2:13, that God who dwells in us helps us to do the things that please Him. But when we read Hebrews chapter thirteen, verses twenty and twenty-one, we get a more comprehensive picture of what the verse in Philippians means.

"Now the God of peace ... make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20,21)

These words clearly state that God works in us through His Son to produce works that are "well-pleasing in His sight."

Now we come to the fifth and the final problem, namely, bad consequences or curses. Speaking of the consequences of sin, the ultimate consequence of being separated from the Father, who is the ultimate source of life, is death. No wonder that Paul says that the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) But the verse does not end here.

"For the wages of sin is death; <u>but the</u> gift of God is eternal life through Jesus <u>Christ our Lord</u>." (Romans 6:23)

When, by grace through faith, we are once again united to God through the indwelling of His Spirit, we are connected to the Source of all life. It is obvious by now that the one who connects us to God is none other than His Son. Therefore, it stands to reason that the gift of eternal life also comes to us through the Son.

"And this is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and He that hath not the Son hath not life." (1 John 5:11,12)

Eternal life is ours, if we believe. It is not something that we are going to experience in the future. Christ has to live in you NOW for salvation to come into your life. If you have this life in you, you have no reason to fear death because your life is hid in Him who conquered the grave.

I hope that by this study, we are able to see how Christ beautifully fits the picture of how sinners are delivered from sin. Just as it is humanly possible to cure a leper, it is also impossible to save a sinner by human efforts. Christ alone was able to heal the lepers in His day, and only He can heal us from sin and its consequences.

The question now is, do you believe that this gospel of salvation through Christ is true? I ask this question because even though all Christians admit that Christ is the only solution to the problem(s) of sin, yet they do not entirely agree or believe and come up with many theories that state otherwise. We cannot say one thing and leave out the other because it would only cause us to remain where we are from the beginning.

"For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did no profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." (Hebrews 4:2)

The problem of sin began with unbelief. Hence, it is necessary to believe before we realise the reality that we can be free from sin. It is no wonder that the Bible keeps on repeating the words "believe" and "faith". John 3:16 spells it out so beautifully and comprehensively when it says that we ought to not only believe, but to believe in the "only begotten Son of God" and, as a result, we shall not perish, "but have everlasting life." For this reason, it is essential that our faith should rest on Him who has conquered sin and death.

"... and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4).

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