

Sin and Its Consequences

The boundary between right and wrong, between that which is permitted and that which is forbidden, has dimmed to a great extent in the way people commonly think about matters today. At the same time, people's morals have become relative. Many are of the opinion that sin no longer has significance for modern man.

The question regarding sin and release from its guilt, however, is at the same time the most painful problem of life for many people. Sin closely connects with the concept of man and his salvation.

The Perfection of Life Was Broken

According to Scripture, God created man in His own image. He gave a mind, will, and conscience to man. Man received everything from God and lived in unity with Him. Everywhere there was perfection, harmony: everything was good (Gen. 1:27, 31.) Man had three basic relationships: a relationship with God, a relationship with other people and a relationship with nature.

Man's committed sin broke the harmony. In the fall into sin he became attracted to evil, he wanted to become as God and thus broke God's will. When he consented to commit sin, man did not care about what God had said. The image of God in man was corrupted and he lost the peace of conscience. He lost his righteousness, his free will, and immortality.

Accusations and distrust arose in the relationship between Adam and his spouse. The ground became cursed: Creation groans in pain (Rom. 8:19–22). The "law of sweat" descended upon man's being, the sweat and furrows of the brow (Gen. 3:17–19, 24).

To correct the destruction brought about by the fall into sin God gave the promise of the seed of the woman, which would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Christ would crush the power of the opponent of God by His remission work. Man is responsible to God and other people for his acts even after the fall into sin.

Original Sin and Actual Sin

The fall into sin brought original sin into the lives of people. Everyone bears the heavy inheritance of the fall. According to the teaching by Paul, "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12). Sin is followed also by guilt, "All the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19).

The inclination of man to evil is customarily called original sin, which could also be called inherited sin or innate sin. It is stated in the Confession of the Lutheran Church that original sin is "so deep and difficult a corruption in our nature, that it may not be recognized by a rational process, but must be believed based on Scripture's revelation."

Original sin is not counted as perdition for a child. He has received by faith the righteousness of life as a gift through the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 5:12, 18, 19). A child is righteous by faith because of the merits of Christ. Luther has written: "Original sin has been removed through Christ and will not condemn anyone after the coming of Christ, except him who does not want to believe."

The inborn corruption in our beings continually tries to present itself in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Our sinfulness brings about individual sinful deeds, actual sins. Man, by nature, is not good. After the fall into sin, he could not and cannot be without committing sin (1 John 1: 8, 10). Evil lust ignites like fire (Finnish Bible-Eccles. 9: 10). Lust tempts and seduces a person into sin, to fulfill his corrupt nature, his being defiled by sin (Matt. 5: 28; James 1: 14, 15; 2 Pet. 2: 14).

WHAT IS SIN?

As an answer to the question, *what is sin?* We usually receive a list of individual acts: murder, theft, lying, adultery, etc. In confirmation class, one hears that young people think that sin is primarily the breaking of God's commandments. Repeatedly, the thought is connected with the concept, "If I can live without breaking the Ten Commandment Law, I will be acceptable before God and will be able to enter heaven." This mode of thought is not the understanding of just a few young people.

However, sin presents a question of more than doing certain deeds or leaving them undone. The roots of sin are in a person himself (Isa. 59: 2; Luke 5: 8; Rom. 3: 23). He not only commits sin but is a sinner. Sin dwells in him (Rom. 7: 17).

The essence of sin is not revealed until it is seen reflected in Christ, in His sanctity and deeds. Above all else, sin is unbelief and mutiny against God (John 16: 9). Sin is like a wedge, like a break in a wall, which separates man from God (Isa. 30: 13). Man wants to be his own master, to depend on himself, separate from God. His sin is defiant pride.

Sin is always sin before God (*coram Deo*, Luther; Ps. 51: 6) and affects the entire personhood of man. Man loves himself and the world, and hates and opposes God and His will. Sin is the denial of the basic relationship of our life, the breaking of the first commandment. "We should fear, love and trust in God above all things."

Temporal and Eternal Consequences

All mankind have encountered sin and its consequences. Sin corrupts a person's relationship with God: Sin separates man from God.

Sin takes a person into immense debt and subjects him to condemnation (Matt. 18:23-32). A person must one day account for what he has done. The history of sin will then come to its conclusion.

Sin is able to deeply corrupt a person's own life and the life of his close ones. Sin brings misfortune into the lives of individuals, into homes, nations and all of mankind. Lustful

sensuality, worldliness, and selfishness disintegrate and break up society and its foundations. Changes brought on by the enactment of laws that make possible the realization of one's own needs erode the bonds of marriage and break up homes. It has been forgotten that "God did not intend marriage to be a shackle, but a source of blessing, happiness, and strength." ([SRK] Annual Meeting, Ranua 1973).

We must always remember the Bible's teaching (Prov. 14:34): "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."

As a consequence and punishment for sin, death came to the God-created earth. We speak about three kinds of death: spiritual, physical, and eternal. According to the Old Catechism, spiritual death is the separation of a person from God, physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body, and eternal death is the person's eternal separation from God (Christian Doctrine 1923, 23).

Sin Demands Reconciliation

With the concept of reconciliation, the New Testament illustrates the atonement for the broken relationship between sinful man and the Holy God. God, in His love, gave His Son Jesus Christ to be the reconciliation for our sins and the offenses of all mankind (1 John 2: 2, 4: 10). Christ was the God who would fulfill the reconciliation, and it was man who needed to be reconciled.

The essential foundation for man's salvation is found in the atoning death and resurrection of Christ. As their fruit we can experience the forgiveness of sins in the congregation of God. God's forgiveness frees man from the bonds of sin and guilt. The core of the gospel is the forgiveness of sins. Unconditional and complete forgiveness separates genuine Christian faith from other religions and other piety.

Sins Are Forgiven

The message of God's kingdom is, "The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1: 15). The message is to call people to repentance, to conversion from sin. Man is unveiled as a sinner when he must account for himself, face to face with the holy will of God. Man becomes conscious of sin through the Law (Rom. 3:20). Standing before the sanctity of God, it is revealed, "I am a sinful person" (Luke 5:8; Isa. 6:5).

Man's prayer before the Holy One becomes, "God, be merciful unto me." (Ps. 51: 3; Dan. 9: 8; Luke 18: 13). There is only one possibility—pardon. Unless there is grace, there shall be no faith in Him who is our help from God, Jesus Christ. Faith is brought about by the gospel whose proclamation is the office of the Holy Spirit. It is the duty of those who believe in Christ to proclaim grace and forgiveness so that unbelief and the power of sin would crumble and obedience of faith would be born.

Sin and the Child of God

A believer is—as the reformers revealed—simultaneously righteous and a sinner (simul

iustus et peccator). It is not easy for one endeavoring in faith to accept the lot of a sinner as the Christian's position before the face of God (Rom. 7: 14–24). In the faith life of a child of God, bad and good moments alternate—consciousness of one's guilt and of the grace of God.

The child of God wants to retain the correct tenderness of a good conscience. He wants to avoid and flee from sin and to live in the care and love of God's kingdom. The gospel is the power for the journey (Rom. 1: 16). In the grace of forgiveness, he experiences the liberating and uplifting blessing of Christ's death and resurrection. Sin and death have lost their power. We have hope of eternal life.

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Possible discussion questions:

- Many today are of the opinion that sin no longer has significance in their lives. Does this attitude affect our society?
- In this presentation it is stated, "Man, by nature, is not good." How then do we explain the actions of the so-called Good Samaritan on the road to Jericho? (Luke 10: 30-36)
- If someone said to you, "I am able to live without breaking the 10 Commandments", how would you reply?
- How can one be both righteous and a sinner at the same time?
- A child of God wants to travel with a clean and undefiled conscience, to avoid and flee from sin. Why is this so important?
- The author stated in the end, "We have hope of eternal life". How can we hold unto this hope?

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