

Sin and Sinfulness

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Chpt. 2-5-21-23

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Original Sin

Adam and Eve lost sanctity and justice by transgressing the Divine commandment. The first parents received a command from God to test their obedience. Through the temptation from Satan, man transgressed the Divine command. The result was being deprived of their original condition of innocence. Death and the evils associated with it follow from the loss of this innocence. God imposed suffering and death as a punishment for sin. Since the punishment is proportionate to the guilt, clearly theirs was a serious sin, as all mankind was, and still is, affected.

Adam's sin is transmitted to his posterity, not by imitation but by descent. Original sin is transmitted in the same way as human nature through the natural act of generation. He transmitted to his posterity death and suffering only, the consequence of his sin but not its guilt. Sinfulness therefore is inborn in man's nature but not his intellect. The removal of the stigma in man's nature is accomplished by the merits of redemption by Jesus Christ and is bestowed in the sacrament of Baptism. Through Baptism everything is taken away that is a true and proper sin. In essence mankind, since Adam, is born and created without sanctifying grace; the existence of supernatural life. Sanctifying grace is the necessary condition to see and experience God and to enter His Kingdom. [Heaven] Through Baptism the soul is re-imbued with sanctifying grace and again reunited with God. In essence, baptism gives man the same start in life as God gave to Adam and Eve; innocence. The temptation of Adam and Eve was for worldly pleasure of eating forbidden fruit which also symbolizes our worldly temptations. In that sense we replicate Adam and Eve through baptism.

Serious Sin

Personal sin is a matter of willfulness. Willfulness in a serious matter is more commonly called mortal sin because it is a conscious and deliberate turning away from God. It is to lose sanctifying grace and results in the death of the soul, which ends up in eternal punishment. Willfulness is not the sole determining factor. Serious matter is still serious matter with or without willfulness. Willfulness will determine one's culpability or degree

of guilt and punishment in the serious matter. Serious matter is still a full turning away from God. The degree of guilt is an important personal experience; for if one feels no guilt then it is impossible to admit one's sins. The feeling of guilt is a wholesome part of sorrow. [Do not confuse this with abnormal guilt.] The positive aspect of guilt is to be a warning that something is not right in our lives and corrective action is needed and should be taken. It is also the burden of guilt that is relieved in addition to the sin when absolution is received in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. A guiltless person is a selfish and indifferent person who lacks charity, mercy and understanding; a person who sees himself as having no equal, a person above all restraints, rules and regulations; a person not receptive to God or Gods' grace.

Guilt and Conscience

There are many who say "I will let my conscience be my guide." This is not at all bad if we have an educated conscience which seeks truth. But what if we are at odds as to what truth is? Individual perceptions of sin and morality may cause a great deal of confusion. Are we free to follow our own way? Even a well-formed conscience needs some guidance in order to keep growing in the path which is right and just. This guidance must come from a reliable forum that has as its only goal the seeking of God's truth. This forum is the Church and the sacrament of forgiveness. Even the Church cannot arbitrarily change the truth to suit the needs of the times. The Church's authority, guided by the Holy Spirit, is fully binding on all consciences, and is the measure from which an educated conscience must seek counsel and use as its guide.

At odds with conscience is emotion, for emotion acts to subdue reason and tends to become an unguided dictate. Emotion tends to fulfill personal wants and become self-seeking, whereas true conscience seeks the relief of true justice. Reason by its very nature is to make a judgment between two points, one good and one bad; one sinful and one virtuous. True justice does not consider pleasure as its measure, but the attainment of the highest purpose for which we were created. Emotions appeal to our base notions of selfishness; justice appeals to unselfishness. If we seek our own pleasure it is rarely lasting; it is a passing satisfaction which continually seeks to be satisfied through a warped and gluttonous conscience. This pleasure cannot escape a feeling of guilt and remorse for there is no true self-approval. Those who do not seek their own pleasure find fulfillment in true justice, for

there is self-approval in dealing fairly with others.

The feelings of guilt are a very important by-product of a proper conscience. We attempt to destroy a proper conscience in an effort to suppress or eliminate guilt. A legal conscience can be appeased simply by changing legality, but a moral conscience can never be appeased because truth is unchangeable. The only true elimination of guilt is remorse and sorrow, not the elimination of conscience. This implies that we must admit we are wrong. This goes contrary to human nature. Again, self-justification is not the basis for a correct conscience. Guilt then can be seen as a contradiction between what the mind knows and what the will dictates. Guilt is the product of trying to reconcile the irreconcilable.

A guiltless conscience becomes a skeptical conscience because it cannot find any truth but its own. It becomes subjective opinion which upholds personal preferences and individual choices; all things become equal. A defective conscience in effect creates and determines its own truth by proclaiming the freedom of conscience. This is to bring truth to the level of conscience rather than to bring conscience to the level of truth upon which conscience depends.

Lesser sins

Lesser sins are a matter of carelessness or momentary weakness. These are more commonly known as venial sins. We have not deliberately turned away from God but in some fashion we have strayed from what God expects of His covenant people. We experience this in less serious matters, sometimes in matters that seem absolutely unimportant. These are still offensive to God but do not cause His wrath, only the retribution for harm done. Again we may not feel the pangs of guilt and therefore see no wrong. However, we equally do not grow deeper into the love of God for we do not seek His perfection. We are commanded by Jesus to be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect. This is the goal we should seek.

Just because we do not commit a serious sin doesn't mean there is cause to rejoice, for it is not what we did not do, but rather what we did do that is our entrance into grace and eternal life or eternal damnation. We cannot measure ourselves as good because of what we had no inclination to do in the first place; but rather in how much willfulness we had in doing good; especially works of charity which are the patterns of Jesus' life. The

Church tells us to pattern our lives after Christ, not after the pleasures of this world which are fleeting; heaven is everlasting.

Sin can be seen as a harm done to self and neighbor as well as defiance of God's authority over us. Many people condition sin to the execution of an action, but sin has its roots in the intention of the will as well as the action. Circumstances may not permit the action to occur but this does not remove the intention. Had circumstances permitted, the action would have occurred and the intent would have been completed. The fact that the action did not occur was an incidental that was beyond the control of the will; for the will and the intent was the intended action. This highlights the major difference between legality and morality. Legally there is no crime [sin] until the action takes place. Morally there is sin due to the intent. We are bound to God by intent not by legalism.

The mere fact that an evil thought enters the mind does not constitute intention or sin. That same thought may enter one's mind many times; it is how we are disposed to handle that thought which graduates to intent. An improper thought, if unsolicited, is no more damaging than a person's feelings which have no right or wrong. It is when we brood upon the feelings and then execute an action to act upon the feelings that intent comes into play. It is when we entertain an evil thought and then lavish it with desire and affection that intent comes into play; for we are in essence saying the evil thought is an object of my love. This in turn denies love to God. It would benefit all to read Mark's' gospel, Ch. 7: 9-23.

The lack of seriousness toward sin makes sin tend to become irrelevant. This is one of the masks sin wears. We can fool each other very easily, on occasion we may even fool ourselves, but it is impossible to fool God who knows all and sees all. In the end it is we, individually, who stand naked before God and have no masks to hide our hearts, our minds, our will our intent, and our deeds. It is only in following God's laws and plan, coupled with a repentant and sorrowful will for our transgressions, that we can have hope in our nakedness.

Sins of Omission

The justice which will be dispensed for love of neighbor, or lack of, is described by Jesus [Mat: 25: 31-46] when all mankind will be divided into two groups; sheep and goats. The primary basis of this judgment was not

the sins of commission which can be forgiven through sorrow but sins of omission which are committed through ignorance or selfishness against neighbor. A lack of caring! Essentially this is seen as callousness and indifference, a lack of sharing love, the suffering aspect of love, and the justice aspect of love. It is only through the empathy aspect of love that we become compassionate. Compassion is the most uplifting and divine experience between two people. Jesus described the nature and essence of love as compassion.

As much as sin is to be avoided at all cost, there are some who take this to extremes and become paralyzed by the fear of sin. They tend to see sin where there is no sin and take excessive measures to guard against sin. They are driven by fears of past sins, present temptations and future possibilities. They are in a panic because they doubt forgiveness, have normal sexual feelings and think of life's problems as punishment for wrong doings. Such scrupulosity may tend to lead some to despair and give up the struggle for goodness as unattainable. At the very least it is a terrible way to live, locked in one's own fears. This is not morality carried to excess but a psychological blockage that impairs good judgment.

Sin then is described as a turning away from God in thought, word and deed. What about turning to God in thought, word and deed? These actions are called virtues. As much as sin is slavery to a master, virtue is a servant to its lover. The Sacrament of Reconciliation changes one from a slave to a lover!

Sin is a Greek word which means, "To miss the mark". It is not just an intellectual error, but a failure to attain a goal. It means rebellion, disloyalty, non-action, failure of obligation, a break of covenant, iniquity and a curse. Iniquity signifies guilt, the distortion that remains as a result of the iniquity. Guilt and sin are a liability before God and remains until removed through reconciliation. Sin arises from the lack of knowledge of God. Man himself is the responsible agent of his sin; the devil is but the tempter.