

The seriousness and problem of sin

Introduction

The doctrine of sin is huge! The Bible speaks about sin almost more than anything else. In the NKJV the word 'sin' appears in 446 verses, 'sins' 197 verses, and 'sinned' 110 verses. In comparison 'righteousness' appears 311 times, 'prayer' 113 times and 'blessed' 303 times. Only 'God' (4393), 'holy' (637), 'heart' (833), 'heaven' (532), 'David' (1086), 'earth' (941), 'spirit' (576) and 'Christ' (554) appear more times.¹ The doctrine of sin is a very large Biblical focus.

The next unusual fact is that modern Christians appear to hardly mention it or understand it. It is true, especially in Charismatic churches, that sin is effectively downplayed. It may be common to hear people sing about being delivered from sin but understanding the effect of sin in one's daily life is almost forgotten. The reason for this is a general antinomianism, which affirms that all our sins are dealt with at the cross and we can continue in sin with impunity. This is little short of a disaster.

Why understanding the doctrine of sin is important

There is not another doctrine as important to understand as this in connection with walking right as a believer. One reason for this is that understanding how we deal with sin requires a basic understanding of many important doctrines, such as justification by faith, redemption, adoption, atonement, grace, God's sovereignty, salvation, prayer, repentance & faith, total depravity, perseverance and, not least, the greatness of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But we don't have to be theologians to defeat sin, we just need to obey the truth of God's word and grow in understanding the background. But to live righteously we must be clear on some important facts regarding what sin is and how to deal with it. It is at this point that the young believer is surrounded by difficulty.

On the issue of dealing with sin there is great confusion in modern churches. There are many denominations that are built around their version of the doctrine of sanctification. There are church movements that promote this or that system of sanctification. Then all these churches and movements promote hundreds of books, some very famous, which all give differing versions of what a Christian is to do.

Thus some demand passivity or inaction after a certain crisis or revelatory experience;² others demand lots of action and striving.³ Some point to the Mosaic Law,⁴ while others demand that we must ignore that law.⁵ Some demand constant repentance,⁶ while other say that this is defeatist and that a faithful stand on Biblical victory obviates repentance.⁷ Some are mystical;⁸ others are practical.⁹ The crisis in some movements has no name, but

¹ This is ignoring prepositions, pronouns and similar common mundane words.

² Higher Life Movement.

³ Legalistic Reformed teaching.

⁴ Traditional Reformed teaching.

⁵ Antinomian groups, many Charismatics and some Hyper-Calvinists.

⁶ Reformed teaching.

⁷ Some Higher Life groups.

⁸ Quietists, Higher Life, Quakers, Wesleyan Methodists, some Charismatics.

⁹ All true Calvinists.

in others has several names (e.g. a ‘baptism in the Spirit’¹⁰ or an ‘act of surrender/consecration’¹¹). Some claim that, once sanctification is properly understood and acted upon, a believer can have complete and constant freedom from sin,¹² while others insist that a believer will always be aware of sin every moment.¹³ Some teach that the principle of sin can be rooted out from the heart after a crisis experience, a second work of grace;¹⁴ others that this experience only dethrones sin from dominion.¹⁵ Several teach that freedom from sin comes by faith for sanctification in a separate work from faith for justification.¹⁶ Some claim entire sanctification while denying sinless perfection.¹⁷ Most believe that the principle of original sin remains in this life, but some claim it is removed.¹⁸ Clearly there is a problem here.

Now there are many sensible books that explain the essential practicalities of fighting sin. These guide the believer in preparation for holiness, seeking forgiveness for sins committed, confession of faults, and repentance (a changed thinking leading to new actions). On these most sound evangelicals are in basic agreement, thus we do not need to survey and expound these too much in this paper. What we do need to do is examine the Biblical principles behind these, especially the theological background to preparing a believer to live a holy life. It is on these issues that there is wide disagreement.

The first problem: defining sin and righteousness.

One of the errors in rogue doctrines about victory over sin is their devaluation, or diminishing, of what sin is. Thus it is easy to proclaim personal victory over all known sins if these sins are a superficial version of what sin really is. Higher Life teaching, Holiness Pentecostals and Wesleyan Methodism (which influenced the first two) claims victory over all known sin. All perfectionist groups teach a form of entire perfection, or complete victory, while at the same time recognising that sin still erupts. Only a few radical heretical groups teach sinless perfection, a perfect life without sin. Wesley taught that sin was rooted out from the heart completely in the second blessing, and yet affirmed that mistakes still occur (which he didn’t explain). Higher Life doesn’t go so far but claims that after a crisis of surrender and faith a believer can be free from the dominion of sin and live a life of constant victory. Holiness Pentecostals are heretical in claiming that even the principle of original sin can be eradicated.

People can live with these errors, and be satisfied in their sinlessness, by reducing the severity of what sin really is. Thus one often hears of ‘victory from all known sin’; but what about the unconscious sins that occur all the time from our old man? Is this not sin? What about thousands of sins of thought and imagination? What about our good works that are yet imperfect? Our subjective views about sin are insufficient. I have met supposed Christians that can feel comfortable in cheating the taxman or entertain very violent thoughts about others. Christ’s teaching makes it clear that these are sins; so the ideas of such folk about their sanctification are wrong. They should grieve over these obvious sins.

¹⁰ John Fletcher of Madeley; Wesley’s appointed successor.

¹¹ Higher Life.

¹² All perfectionists; Higher Life, Methodists, many Charismatics.

¹³ Reformed teaching.

¹⁴ Wesleyan Methodism.

¹⁵ Higher Life.

¹⁶ Wesleyan Methodism, Higher Life.

¹⁷ Assemblies of God, John Wesley.

¹⁸ Holiness Pentecostals.

We must understand what sin is in God's eyes and measure ourselves by that. This means that we must also understand God's measure of holiness and see how far short we fall.

God's standard of righteousness

Christians have all sorts of answers as to what God's standard of righteous behaviour for the Christian is. These would include:

- The moral principles found in the Mosaic Law. [E.g. Reformed teaching.]
- The general principles found in the moral law instilled in all men at creation. [Certain heretical groups; Andrew Fuller taught something similar.]
- **WHATEVER A MAN KNOWS ABOUT MORAL LAW.** [CG Finney; thus a moral idiot could be righteous and yet do many sinful things; his lack of knowledge excuses him. The formula for this is 'obligation or responsibility depends upon ability'. This is pure Pelagianism.]
- **THE HOLY SPIRIT RECEIVED AS AN EXPERIENCE WITHIN.** [Thus many Charismatics who divorce the Spirit from Scripture or God's law and believe that his inner prompting are all that they need. Needless to say, this is absolute subjectivity. No one can ever know what is really the Spirit and what is their own feelings, or even demonic temptation.]
- **SCRIPTURE IN A GENERAL WAY.** [Thus many evangelical Christians.]
- **SCRIPTURE IN A SPECIFIC WAY,** normally the Sermon on the Mount teaching. [Thus some modern evangelicals.]
- **THE MORAL PRINCIPLES OF THE MOSAIC LAW REAFFIRMED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.** [Thus New Covenant Theology.]

Now several of these have some valuable points. The moral principles of the Mosaic Law are good, but they don't go far enough. Jesus internalised and extended these in the Sermon on the Mount; therefore we must have righteous inner motivations as well as external deeds. We must love from the heart as well as not commit violence. The principles of Scripture are surely good, both in general and specifically. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is important without doubt. But none of these reaches God's clear standard of righteousness required for humans.

Christ is our standard

God's standard of righteousness is Christ! There can be no doubt that this is clear apostolic teaching. We are to come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Eph 4:13) and this cannot be attained in this life while we have an old nature within and a natural body without.

The moral principles in the heart given at creation, and those in the Mosaic Law, point to this fulness in Christ but give no help in attaining it. Indeed, the Law of Moses chiefly condemns our failures to reach it.

The New Testament highlights many principles of righteousness and even gives lists of right behaviour, but these are merely the expression of Christ in human behaviour. The completeness and perfection is in Christ. But the amazing thing is that the New Covenant in Christ entails power to perform the righteousness that it commands. The Gospel changes believers in the depths of their being by giving resurrection life, the life of Christ. The Lord also sends his Spirit to indwell, instruct and empower believers to follow Christ and implement his words. Thus unlike Mosaic Law, Christ gives commands and power so that his people can not only know, but also obey God's will for man.

To cement this, we read of Jesus' own instructions to his people:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples. Jn 13:34-35

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Jn 15:12

These both show that Christ's covenant, firstly, includes commands, elsewhere described as the 'Law of Christ' (Gal 6:2) so any system which denies the need for law must be wrong. This law is God's eternal moral law, or his will for man's behaviour, first evidenced in the conscience of all men, then amplified in the Mosaic Law (Ten Commandments) and further amplified by the teaching and example of Christ interpreted, revealed by his Spirit in the new man (Jn 16:13).

But further than the fact that Christ gives his people commands and law, revealed and worked in us by the Spirit, his command is that we don't have any filter for the regulation of human behaviour except his own life. We are to love as he loved, not as man prescribes, not as Mosaic Law commanded, not by our interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, but as he loves. Christ is the standard for human behaviour. It is by this standard that men will be judged on the last day, and it is this standard that Christians are to live by. We are to 'look to Christ'; he is our forerunner, author and finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2). He is the end of the law (Rm 10:4). Christ must be our focus and nothing else.

So what is sin?

In essence sin is any human behaviour which is not based in Christ. One reason why sin is a huge doctrine is that there are so many words used to describe sin. Every aspect of sin is a failing to live up to the life of Christ and has a particular name:

New Testament words for sin

- **TRANSGRESSION** (*parabasis*): overstepping bounds, breaking law (Gal 3:19)
- **TRESPASS** (*paraptoma*): a false step, a blunder, deviation from truth (Matt 6:14)
- **LAW-BREAKING** (*paranomia*): (2 Pt 2:16)
- **INIQUITY** (*poneria*): wickedness, perversity (Matt 7:23)
- **ERROR** (*plane*): disregard of the right, go astray (Rm 1:27)
- **ERROR** (*agnoema*): a sin of ignorance (Heb 9:7)
- **SIN** (*Harmartia*): falling short of the mark as an arrow, failure (Rm 4:7-8)
- **EVIL** (*kakos*): actual wrong, opposition to God's righteousness, base (Matt 21:41)
- **EVIL** (*poneros*): evil that causes labour, pain, sorrow; bad, worthless (Matt 7:11)
- **UNGODLINESS** (*asebeia*): no fear of God, no likeness to God (Rm 1:18)
- **DISOBEDIENCE** (*harmartema*): unwillingness to be led in truth, rebellion (Mk 3:29)
- **DISOBEDIENCE** (*apeitheia*): unpersuadable, obstinacy, rejection of truth (Eph 2:2)
- **DISOBEDIENCE** (*parakoe*): refusal to hear (Rm 5:19)
- **UNBELIEF** (*apistia*): refusing to have faith (Matt 13:58)
- **LAWLESSNESS** (*anomia*): contempt of law, authority (1 Jn 3:4)
- **UNRIGHTEOUSNESS** (*adikia*): lit. not rightness (Lk 16:8)
- **WRONG-DOING** (*adikema*): wrong, injury, misdeed, concrete act of unrighteousness (Acts 18:14)

Many other words could be added to this list; man's behaviour is also: loveless, a rejection of God, illegal, sensual, anarchical, etc.

In the OT we have several corresponding words, such as

- *Chata*, to miss the way (equivalent to *harmartia*; Prov 8:36).
- *Avah*, to bend or twist, hence perversity (Prov 12:8).
- '*Aven*, meaning iniquity, trouble, wickedness (Ps 36:4).
- '*Avon*, iniquity, perversity derived from '*avah* (1 Sam 20:1).
- '*Asham*, sin, guilt, trespass (Gen 26:10).
- '*Amal*, meaning evil, trouble, wickedness, labour (Job 4:8).

- *Pesha*, transgression, rebellion (Ex 34:7).
- *Rasha*, wicked, criminal, guilty (Ex 23:1).

We can examine the various words for sin: lawlessness, iniquity, transgression and so forth, and draw much useful information; but the apostles most often used the Greek word *hamartia* to describe sin. This word means ‘missing the mark, ‘falling short’ like an arrow failing to reach the target (‘mark’). This is a good way to describe sin because it highlights the fact that man fails to come up to the standard of God’s righteousness in Christ. An arrow that doesn’t reach the target is useless, no matter how good the aim; it has utterly failed to meet its purpose. [The section (locus) in some systematic theologies on sin is called ‘Harmartology’.] So, Christ is the goal of righteousness and missing that mark is sin.

The standard for evaluating sin is anything that fails to reach the standard of human behaviour seen in Christ. So love that is praised by men is sin if it is not the love of Christ as empowered by his Spirit. Work performed well is sin if it is not done in the power of Christ. So the Biblical definition of sin is far more strenuous than that which is seen in almost all the sanctification theories. Anything which demands less than God’s standard is to be rejected. This is why the normal work of men is said in Scripture to be sin (Prov 21:4; Rm 14:23); totally depraved men, men without Christ, can do no good work at all.

Sin lies in motivation and source more than action

Note that a certain act can be both evil and good depending upon the person enacting it. A murderer may kill someone in cold blood and that is sin; but a judge sentencing the murderer to death and the hangman that hangs him are not guilty of sin. Sin lies in the ethical direction of the deed, in the corrupt motivation of the deed. The root of sin lies in the heart, mind and will not so much in the act. What is inside a man defiles him not what is outside (Matt 15:11). This also means that a seemingly good or innocent act may be the result of a sinful intention. Scheming people do apparently decent things in order to achieve wicked ends; this is particularly the stuff of politicians.

The root of sin lies in the believer’s old nature or ‘old man’. This is the Adamic nature which fell in Adam and became totally depraved in every area of man’s life. Man not only became un-savable by his own powers but became a vessel of sin; nothing he did was without sin. Nothing he did could reach God’s standard of holiness and perfection. Nothing he could do was truly good. The fall of Adam made a direct link between mankind and Satan through accepting the temptation of the serpent. Fallen man is thus dead in trespasses and sins, totally unable to do any spiritual good and following the prince of darkness. When Christians sin, they are expressing this fallen man and thus they fail to express Christ through the new man. The old man expresses the Adamic fallen nature and thus Satan’s pride and rebellion; the new nature manifests Christ in holiness.

Therefore, the motivation for sin in men is Satanic; it derives from the temptations of the devil. The essence of all sin is therefore, as the expression of the devil, slander of God and rebellion against God’s laws. Sin is the expression of enmity against God.

The carnal mind /s enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.
Rm 8:7

Problem two: Antinomianism

One of the greatest problems in the modern church is the sin of Antinomianism. This essentially means living against any form of law or denying that law is operable for the

Christian. It arises when men misinterpret Paul's teaching on deliverance from sin in Christ and throw out the law entirely.

All men are always under some form of law – all men, all the time. There is never a time when man is not under law, is not controlled by God's law. This is because law is simply the will of God regarding human behaviour. God has a standard of righteous living and this is expressed in law; i.e. God demands that we live a certain way. There are different forms of law applicable to different people.

To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law [literally 'in-law'] toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law. 1 Cor 9:20-21

Jews are under the Mosaic Law; Gentiles are without the Mosaic Law but are still under the Moral Law of God. Christians (like Paul here) are in-lawed to Christ (i.e. they fulfil the law in Christ); they are not under the Mosaic Law but they do fulfil its moral commands. Thus there are three aspects to God's law.¹⁹

People group	Application of God's law	Texts
Natural men, sinners <i>[An internal but incomplete law without power.]</i>	The Moral Law: which was taught to Adam by God and subsequently passed on through parental training. The work of this law is also written on men's hearts (consciences).	Rm 2:12-15
Jews between the time of Moses and Christ <i>[An external law, more complete than the Moral law but without power to obey.]</i>	The Mosaic Law: which was temporary until Christ came and was intended to magnify sin and point to the need of a Saviour in Christ.	Deut 31:12; Rm 3:19, 4:15, 5:20; Gal 3:19, 23-25, 4:4-5; Heb 7:11-12, 8:13
Christians <i>[An internal and complete law with the spiritual power to obey.]</i>	The Law of Christ: which incorporates the Moral Law and all the moral principles found in the Mosaic Law. It is mediated by the Holy Spirit within the believer, who empowers him to obey it in thought, word and deed.	Rm 3:31, 6:14, 7:3, 8:4; Gal 2:19-20, 5:18; 1 Tim 1:9; Heb 8:6-7, 10:16

Antinomianism in history

There has been a repeated tendency, throughout church history, to fail to properly grasp Paul's teaching on law and sanctification. Ignoring his statements that we are under Christ's law (e.g. Gal 6:2) they interpret his statements showing that we are not under Mosaic Law (e.g. Rm 6:14, 7:4) as meaning that we are not under any form of law at all. That this is both wicked and foolish is shown by the repeated statements of Christ himself, and other apostles, that the believer must obey his commandments (Jn 14:21, 15:10; 1 Jn 2:4, 3:22, 5:2-3).

The salvation of Christ does not mean that we abandon God's requirements for holy living; neither do they mean that we merely live on the basis of our subjective feelings and ignore external forms of law. The Christian keeps God's law through the power of the Spirit and this law incorporates all the moral aspects of law found in Scripture where the requirements of God are laid down objectively to help clarify issues for us. Both the OT and

¹⁹ For more information on this subject see my paper, 'Law and the Believer – Just Scripture' and my book 'The Believer's Relationship to the Law'.

the NT are filled with laws, which the believer is meant to obey, but can only do so as he is walking in the Spirit and putting on the new man.

Although Antinomianism has always been present in the church, it became a serious problem during the Reformation when people misunderstood the liberty they had in Christ taught by the Reformers. Instead of just throwing away the shackles of human legalism imposed upon them by the Roman church, they threw off all law and lived according to their subjective feelings. Thus Luther was the first to use the formal term 'antinomianism' against Johan Agricola. The emphasis on justification by faith always carries the danger that believers revel in their pardon from sin and fail to live holy lives. This is why Paul wrote chapter 6 and 7 of Romans. The Gospel does not condone licentiousness.

Later on Lutherans, and certain Puritans, Reformed Baptists and some Brethren, held antinomian ideas. However, the biggest spread of antinomian teaching came through the American Holiness Movement, the parallel British Higher Life Movement and then the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements. Although there are wide variations in their teaching and practices, these all have a tendency to misinterpret Romans 6 and 7.

Modern Antinomianism

It is now common in Charismatic circles to hear people speak of being completely free from sins because the cross has paid for them all, with the view that sin is not a matter to be concerned about. They have no qualms about doing unrighteous things because the cross has set them free from sin and death. Because all sins, past, present and future, have been pardoned, their behaviour can never be condemned. This is false teaching.

Genuine justification leads to holy behaviour. If a person does not change after being converted then there are good grounds to suspect that the person is not saved at all. True believers grow in holiness and become more sensitive to sin, not less. The cross of Christ does not de-sensitise us to sin but makes us even more sensitive to it.

A characteristic of Antinomianism is the devaluing or dumbing-down of sinful acts. Antinomians and Perfectionists claim to be sin free because they devalue sin and tolerate unrighteousness in themselves. They sin even as they claim to be without sin.

A certain Charismatic apostle, claimed by some to be a Calvinist, has taught on being free from law, while expounding Romans 7, saying that even if a believer kicked an old lady across the street he would not be guilty of any sin. It is false teaching like this that has led some Charismatics (such as Todd Bentley) to actually kick a lady in the face in a meeting. In our church if a member was unrepentant about kicking an old lady after admonition, we would disfellowship them immediately.

Christians must follow the law of Christ and obey all his commandments. They do this in the power of the Spirit and not as a matter of legalism, and in doing so they manifest the fruit of the Spirit. If people behave in a manner opposite to the fruit of the Spirit, then there is a problem with sin.

Calling sin, sin

Many Antinomians get by through redefining sin. The errors that they commit are not treated as sins but as momentary weaknesses or a momentary lapse of faith. Many sins are redefined so as not to appear as sin at all. Thus Antinomians claim that they are sinless whilst clearly demonstrating to others their sinful behaviour. In order to avoid such hypocrisy it is vital to call sin, sin.

All sin is obnoxious to God, even those sins which are common in society and which all too many believers commit in church without fear. We must begin to look at sin as God does and not trifle with small sins while avoiding big ones. Thus lying is never acceptable for instance. We should remember that God's word equates gossiping and meddling with murder in 1 Pt 4:15. Being a busybody and gossiping is saying things you ought not to say (1 Tim 5:13). Gossip is sin, plain and simple. Interfering in another's affairs is sin, plain and simple. When in doubt, don't!

The putting away of sin in the believer

Having written off antinomianism, we must now also explain how sin has been 'destroyed' in Christians and yet still erupts.

If God hates sin how does he love believers?

The modern aphorism that God hates sin but loves the sinner is nonsense. The Bible everywhere explains that sin is inextricably bound with the sinner and that God hates the wicked for their sins (Ps 5:6). The soul that sins shall die (Ezek 18:4). This is clearly true of the reprobate but what of the Christian?

God hates the nature that causes sin in the Christian just as he does in the wicked, but the Christian has two natures. The new nature in the believer is loved because it is in Christ and spiritually alive; the old nature is hated because it is spiritually dead in sins. At the end, this nature is obliterated but at the moment the sentence of death has been passed upon it and it is to be considered dead; but the finality of the sentence has not been carried out. It is dead in God's eyes but to us it still erupts when we feed it.

Of the several passages that teach this, the most important is Romans 6,

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?

4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His* resurrection,

6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.

10 For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God.

11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In verse 6 ‘done away with’ is the Greek word *Katargeo*, meaning ‘to render idle, to have no efficiency, to be deprived of force, loosed’; the AV translation of ‘destroyed’ is too emphatic. The old nature was co-crucified with Christ and one reason that God chose this form of death out of many is that the death was slow and prolonged, often spanning two or three days for a healthy man. In God’s eyes this sentence of death has been carried out in Christ but for us the fulness of salvation only comes when Christ returns and we are given a new body and our life is resurrected completely. At this stage the resurrection is only in the spirit, not the whole man.

The believer has died to sin (v2) and as a result of that judicial death he no longer has to live in it. Now this death has occurred as a legal sentence in God’s eyes as judge, but the finality of it has not been carried out fully, and will not be until the old nature is rooted out of the believer at the end when Christ returns. There are many statements about the effect of the cross which appear final, but in our actual experiences are far from it. There is a difference between our heavenly status and our earthly experience. Thus Colossians 1:13 tells us that we have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of Christ, and yet we feel constantly assailed by the powers of darkness. Philippians 3:20 tells us that we are citizens of heaven, but we are constantly troubled by our citizenship of earth. Eph 2:6 tells us that we are seated in heaven with Christ, yet we are too aware of our being seated in a troubled world. The blessings of salvation have taken full force in our spirits, the past tense of salvation, but the effect of this on our experience (our soul and body) has yet to occur.

The death of the old nature is a spiritual truth to be upheld by faith. As the believer applies this he makes progress in the present tense of salvation in saving his soul progressively.²⁰ The final stage of salvation is when we are given a new body like Christ’s – the future tense of salvation; redemption is then complete.

Thus the believer has to trust in the death of the old nature and apply that by putting on the new man (Eph 4:22-24). However, if he fails to do this, the old man can reaffirm its hold on the personality and lead the believer into sin. In illustrative terms, this would be like feeding a crucified man and extending his life. Thus Paul tells believers to put to death the impulses of the old man,

For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Rm 8:13

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Col 3:5

Therefore the believer is commanded to reckon himself, or consider himself, dead to sin and then chose to live righteously. That is, although he is not yet actually freed from sin, he must live by faith in God’s judgment on the old nature and live as though it is dead. Sin no longer has dominion over the believer like it once did, it can now be rejected (Rm 6:6).

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you. Rm 6:12-14

In Galatians Paul sums this up as,

²⁰ Note the saving of the soul in 1 Peter 1:8-9, 22, 4:19; Jm 1:21. If these verses meant salvation in general they would teach meritorious redemption. They do not; they are referring to the gradual salvation of the soul in progressive sanctification.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Gal 2:20

Many Charismatic and Higher Life groups (which includes many Holiness and Pentecostal works) take ‘destroyed’ (Rm 6:6) literally and believe that there is no sinful nature left, and this leads to their Antinomianism. That this is not true is clearly demonstrated in the believer’s ability to sin easily and the multitude of apostolic warnings about falling into sin. Indeed the works of the flesh are often listed so that we can see when we are in it and are not walking in the Spirit (e.g. Gal 5:19-21; Col 3:8-9).

The believer progressing in sanctification is the one who is resting on the truth of the death of his old nature and has crucified (applied the death) his inwards lusts,

Those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Gal 5:24

Sin is not yet removed from our life but the power of it is undercut and its dominion crucified.

The effect of a Christian’s sin upon God

Having explained how sin is to be considered dead in the believer, we must now investigate what happens when sin is resurrected by giving in to temptation.

Grieving

While God says that he cast all our sins behind his back judicially (Isa 38:17), his word also shows that his Spirit (who is God) is grieved by our failures (Eph 4:30). Believers make God sorrowful by our sins. How is this possible? This is because there is a difference between definitive sanctification, progressive sanctification and glorification. Definitive sanctification is a washing that enables us to stand perfect in the spirit in heaven (1 Cor 6:11) as well as being declared righteous in Christ (justification). This is why we can be called saints in Scripture despite the fact that we sin. Progressive sanctification is the process of growing in holiness in this life, which is a learning process in the soul. Glorification is our perfection at the end.

The scope of salvation		
Past tense of salvation	Present tense of salvation	Future tense of salvation
Definitive sanctification	Progressive sanctification	Glorification
The human spirit saved (regenerated)	The soul being saved	The body removed, the provision of a glorified body, the removal of the old nature and the instant completion of sanctification.
Seated with Christ	Walking in the Spirit	Being as he is
Being in the heavenlies	Living on earth by the Spirit	Being part of the new heaven and new earth where heaven and earth are one.

The believer in this present time straddles two separate worlds. One the one hand he is walking in this world with a recalcitrant old nature which erupts and sins all the time in thought, word and deed. One the other hand he is seated in heaven with Christ and fellowships with God in the Spirit in perfection (Eph 2:6). This is because the believer has two natures until the return of Christ when his nature becomes single and glorified, having a new heavenly body to accompany his new spirit.

One earth now, the believer has an old nature which grows in corruption (Eph 4:22-24) and also a new nature which is perfect and made in the likeness of Christ. Progressive sanctification is all about the battle to put off the old man and put on the new. Believers fellowship with God in purity in the new man; believers succumb to the temptations of the devil in the old man. The new man can say that God has cast all my sins behind his back; the old man can say that I grow in corruption and I'm deeply sinful.

Thus when a believer gives in to the old man and sins, he disappoints God and the Spirit within his heart grieves. Our sins affect God and cause a reaction. The idea that a believer's sins committed after conversion have no effect on God is nonsense.

Displeasure

God is holy. Indeed, holiness is the chief attribute of God, who is perfect in holiness. As such, God hates sin. The reason God sent his only begotten Son into the world was to put an end to sin and provide salvation for his chosen people from sin. We have very little appreciation of how much God hates sin; if we did we would fall to the floor and bewail our sinfulness in his eyes.

Since God hates sin, it is obvious that he hates sin in his people. Though he has provided a Saviour from sin for them, he still hates it. When sin erupted at various times in the camp of Israel, God's judgment on sin was severe – yet all these people had been delivered from the Egyptians by miraculous means and had all been under the shed blood of the Passover lamb. Hebrews tells us that God was angry (indeed, full of wrath) with that generation and they did not enter his rest because of their sins, except for Joshua and Caleb (Heb 3:11). This is a lesson to believers today not to take sin lightly but to be intolerant of it. Note an example of God's anger with these Israelites:

The anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you. Deut 9:19

Even the psalmist David, a true worshipper of God, knew God's displeasure against his sin, A Psalm of David. O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Ps 6:1

A Psalm of David. To bring to remembrance. O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure! For Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down. *There is no soundness in my flesh Because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin.* Ps 38:1-3

We can never treat sin trivially because it offends our God, who hates sin.

Fatherly discipline

There are two mistakes that believers make regarding the divine reaction to their sins. The first is to teach that their sins break their relationship with God. This may feel true from their subjective experience of divine favour, but it is great mistake to say this. A believer's relationship with God is the result of his being organically united to the Godhead through being raised from the dead and united with Christ. The church is the body of Christ and those who are in Christ cannot be removed by the actions of men.

We, *being* many, are one body in Christ. Rm 12:5

Now you are the body of Christ. 1 Cor 12:27

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given *them* to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of my Father's hand. I and *my* Father are one. Jn 10:27-30

The Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 1 Pt 4:14

Since we have been given eternal life and placed in Christ, it is impossible to be removed (this is a key reason why saints cannot fall away). Thus to say that your sins have broken your relationship with God is an error and dishonouring his name.

The second mistake is to say that your sin has no effect on God at all since the cross has given your perpetual forgiveness. We have already explained this.

So what is the true position?

When you were regenerated you became a son of the Father; God is the Father of all those who truly believe. The application of Christ's redemption to you by the Spirit has joined you to the family of God and the Father's love is always toward you since you are in Christ and he is the Father's beloved. When you sin, God's love is still toward you in the new man but as a Father he must act in discipline to teach you righteousness. Thus God chastises the errant child.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.' If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled. Heb 12:5-15

Now this chastising can take many forms, always perfectly suited to the individual and occasion in God's wisdom. It may involve sickness and difficult circumstances but outsiders must always beware in attributing these to sin since God also uses them to train righteous people in perseverance (as in the case of Job).

Those who claim that God never disciplines his children for their sin should note the words used above:

- Chastening: *paideuo* meaning - to train children, to be instructed, to chastise, to correct by reproof and admonition, to chasten by the affliction of evils and calamities, to chastise with blows.
- Rebuked: *elegcho* meaning - to convict, refute, confute (generally with a suggestion of shame of the person convicted), find fault with, to reprehend severely, chide, admonish, reprove, show one his fault, chasten, to punish.
- Scourges: *mastigoo* meaning – to beat with a lash or whip, to flog, scourge, whip.

These are serious words and cannot be downplayed.

In experience we can see that God develops his discipline. Initially there is a conviction applied by the Spirit, which if ignored, leads to a rebuke. When ignored this leads to chastening and if this is ignored there follows scourging. If a person fails to repent following a prolonged period of apparent chastening, there has to be serious reconsideration as to whether they are true believers at all since all genuine Christians will grow in grace and bear the fruits of salvation.

I have known people in the church who were greatly respected as extremely godly people, some of them leaders and leader's wives, who fell into great sin. Despite admonition and rebuke they refused to repent and twenty years later they are still unrepentant and happy in a worldly life away from the church. In cases like this we have to conclude that these people could never have been Christians at all.

It is impossible to maintain the position that sins have no effect on God and that there is impunity for lawlessness in the believer.

Forgiveness in grace

The grace of God is always towards the believer in Christ. The light of God always shines upon a believer, even if he can't see it. When John Darby preached this on one occasion, a questioner asked if the light of God still shone on a backslider. Darby retorted, 'The light of God shines on his back'. Although God, as a Father, is displeased with sin, God, as a Father, still loves his children. God does not cease loving his true children if they sin and brings them to conviction, repentance and forgiveness.

Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ. 2 Cor 2:14

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities. Ps 103:2-3

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us. Eph 1:7-8

Your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 1 Jn 2:12

Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works. Titus 2:13-14

Every lawless deed is forgiven us in Christ and the Christian is preserved unto the end and purified for God's glory. Sin is not left undealt with in the believer but is forgiven daily and finally killed off when the old nature is actually destroyed at the end, as well as being written off in God's eyes already (Rm 6:6).

The effect of sin upon a Christian

Having looked at various aspects of the theology of sin, what are the practical steps a believer must take when he commits sin?

Recognition

Sin must never be ignored or downplayed; it must always result in a reaction and doing something positive to fix the problem. As God recognises the sin, so also the believer must recognise the sin. The more mature a believer gets, the more he walks in the Spirit and the more sensitive he becomes to his own failings. Those people who never do anything about their sins, or ignore them altogether, demonstrate that they are not genuine believers.

Conviction

The Holy Spirit always applies conviction in order to convince a person of his sins. There is never any doubt about sin once committed; conviction ensures that the sinner knows that he is guilty before God.

Now conviction must be discriminated from false accusation. The devil continually accuses the brethren (hence his name 'Satan', 'adversary'; Rev 12:10) to bring them down and weaken them even when they have done no evil. The devil's accusation is often amorphous

and vague, producing bad feelings that have no discernible root; however, the conviction of the Spirit is always clear and to the point, 'You are the man' (2 Sam 12:7). The false accusations of Satan must be resisted and denied; but the conviction of the Spirit must be listened to. This conviction will focus upon a particular sin and there will be no denying that it is wicked.

Mourning

This is so important and yet a matter that is just about forgotten in the modern church.

Christians are people who grieve: 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted' (Matt 5:4). The Beatitudes are not meant to be taken at face value, but are descriptions of the life of those in Christ; those who are blessed; characteristics of the sons of the Kingdom; those who are salt in the earth (Matt 5:13). One characteristic of the Christian life is that it knows a constant mourning; this is not the natural grief of bereavement but the mourning for sin that carries on throughout this life of weakness.

This grief for sin is exemplified by the psalmist,

When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah I acknowledged my sin to you, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Ps 32:3-5

Mourning for sin must come before confession and forgiveness.

This mourning is expressed many times in Scripture,

I am poor and sorrowful; let your salvation, O God, set me up on high. Ps 69:29

The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Ps 116:3

Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing. Ps 126:5-6

Like a crane or a swallow, so I chattered; I mourned like a dove; my eyes fail from looking upward. O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me! Isa 38:14

Those who survive will escape and be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, each for his iniquity. Ezek 7:16

Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted. 2 Cor 7:9-10

Mourning is the natural response to conviction of sin. If there is true conviction, then there will be genuine mourning. We must begin to understand how awful our sin is to a holy God; one result of such an understanding is to grieve over our sins.

Those modern Antinomians who teach that Christians should always rejoice and never worry about their sins show that they have no understanding about the nature and importance of sin, or even about the concerns of a righteous God. Yes Christians should generally rejoice in Christ, for we know true salvation and have a future and a hope; but believers must also grieve when others grieve, weep with those who weep (Rm 12:15), be sad when others suffer (1 Cor 12:26) and should mourn over their own sin.

Confession

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *ours* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 Jn 1:8-9

I acknowledged my sin to you, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Ps 32:5

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin *is* always before me. Ps 51:2-3

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy. Prov 28:13

Confession is a vital part of the Christian experience; without confession there is no cleansing of the conscience. Both the Old and New Testaments show us that confession is a proper attitude of sanctified saints. This is how believers clear the subjective guilt of sin.

Now many Antinomians deny any need for confession believing that when they once confessed their sins and were converted, they were forgiven all sins (past, present and future) and have no need for further confessions. Indeed, some even aver that to confess any sin is a lack of faith that they are cleansed by Christ,

This is a grave mistake. John tells us that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves (1 Jn 1:8, 10). Sin is not removed from the Christian at conversion but it is overpowered. The guilt of sin is forgiven and the power of it is undercut. Antinomians fail to understand that although we have a new perfect nature, the old sinful nature is not removed until the end, and the Christian has a daily choice which to manifest. Sin depends upon the Christian's will to manifest to life of Christ. Failure to do this results in sin and this sin needs to be confessed in order to be cleansed in the heart and conscience.

Christians who do not quickly confess their sins will have a disturbed conscience that will not get healed. Furthermore they will grieve God and are heading for severe chastisement.

Repentance

Confession of sins is only half of the fixing of the sin problem. The other half is repentance, and this is much misunderstood.

Repentance is not confession; when you confess your sin you have not yet repented. 'Repentance' is the Greek word *metanoia*, which means a change of mind and purpose, a turning about, correction. It is like a ship which suddenly changes its course and goes in the opposite direction.

Thus repentance follows confession of a certain sin and it is the commitment to not do it again and to change the direction of one's life away from that sin. Thus there is a sense in which the whole Christian life is a life of repentance, following a new direction to follow Christ away from the previous direction of one's sinful habits. Thus the repentant life is putting on the new nature everyday and determining not to put on the old life.

Repentance must follow confession of sin or there is no progress in holiness.

The problem of identifying where sin lives

Here I want to try to be as concise as I can because this opens up a very large subject, which we cannot fully evaluate in this paper.

We have established that sin lies in the old nature, but we must discuss how this results in actions in the world. In treating this subject many preachers have made fundamental errors, including some popular Reformed men. If we fail to understand this we will be unable to deal with sin, either in ourselves or in counselling others.

The nature of man

We first must establish what the essential nature of man is. Most Reformed theologians believe that man's nature is twofold consisting of body and soul; an outer nature and an inner nature. They tend to do this to avoid Platonic, or rather Neo-Platonic, ideas. This is called dichotomy, the notion that man is bipartite. The real problem is that dichotomists cannot avoid repeatedly making a distinction between soul and spirit in their teaching. Sometimes these are given different names such as the higher and lower mind; or the 'animating principle' (spirit) and the 'animated result' (soul). They do this because Scripture makes a constant and clear difference between soul and spirit.

It is true that these terms are also used in a generalised way. In the OT *ruach* (spirit) is the principle of life and *nephesh* (soul) is the bearer or subject of life. The life indicated by both these terms is applied to man and animals. 'A living soul' is a living creature, a creature with life (Gen 1:30); but, in addition, the '*ruach* of life' animates all creatures threatened by the flood (Gen 6:17). So both spirit and soul are sometimes applied to all animals in a general way to indicate that they are living. However, *ruach* is constantly used as the animating principle and *nephesh* for the animated result. In my view this reveals this difference between them; the one sparks off the other; the directing power is the spirit while the manifestation of this power is in the soul. Yes they are two aspects of life, but these differences must be noted and appreciated.

So, when mere physical life is referred to in the OT, spirit and soul are sometimes applied in a generalised manner. However, when mental faculties are in view as distinct from physical life we need to distinguish these terms. Reformed teachers treat spirit and soul as synonymous when referring to the mind, harping back to OT usage where this is done, but this is because the soul is the executive means by which the spirit expresses itself in the body. The one is the expression of the other. But the NT has a word for mind which the Hebrew did not have, which is why cognitive functions were ascribed to the spirit in the OT which are not in the NT.

Thus the NT clearly makes a distinction between spirit and soul and ascribes them different functions:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thess 5:23

For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Heb 4:12

Reformed theologians (who are supposed to uphold the final authority of Scripture) usually fail to explain these texts properly or even ignore them altogether. They unequivocally reveal that in God's eyes there is a distinction between soul and spirit and that it has a place in understanding our sanctification.²¹ Our body will be saved at the end when Christ returns; our spirit has been regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit; it is our soul with which we have to concentrate upon in progressive sanctification. The

²¹ This is trichotomy, the belief that man has three chief organs, or a tripartite nature.

separation of the soul and the spirit reveals the heart, which is the beginning of human actions.

The human spirit is where the new man resides. The new man is made unto the likeness of Christ and is a spiritual faculty and can only live in a spiritual place.

Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Eph 4:23-24

Put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. Col 3:10

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts. Rm 13:14

By putting on the new man we put on Christ and stop the flesh becoming activated. Thus putting on the new man is allowing the law of Christ in our spirit to dominate our soul and then the soul controls the body to conform to this law. The soul is a neutral vessel which constitutes our personality. It is the real me, the self. The soul, when motivated by the spirit (the new man), obeys God and the body manifests good works. When the soul is dominated by the old nature the body sins.

So where is the old nature?

Where was the sin concentrated after the fall? What is said to be wicked and deceitful in man in God's eyes?

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. Gen 6:5

The fool has said in his heart, '*There is* no God.' They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. Ps 14:1

Thus says the LORD: '*Cursed is* the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD.' Jer 17:5

The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, / test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings. Jer 17:9-10

God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting. Rm 1:28

The source of sin in man is in the heart and mind. This is because it is out of the heart that the issues of life flow:

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life. Prov 4:23

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. Matt 15:18

The heart is the junction, or gateway, between the soul and the spirit. It is the centre of the human personality and the root that directs the soul to commit itself to a certain action. The soul implements what the heart has directed. Note what James says,

Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires [lusts] and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Jm 1:14-15

Sin arises from lusts within, lusts which are tempted by Satan. Note that lusts are not external, not in the body initially, but within. But where are these inner lusts.

Do not lust after her beauty in your heart. Prov 6:25

But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matt 5:28

Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. 1 Pt 2:11

The lust of the flesh. 1 Jn 2:16

The lusts that prompt sin develop in the wicked heart of man. Thus the first sin is the motivation in the heart, the second sin is in the action prompted by the heart. A man who commits adultery first sins in his heart, and then in action. Notice that the heart that gives in to sin is also called the flesh. Lusts arise in the heart; lusts arise in the flesh. When a Christian gives in to a wicked heart, he becomes flesh; when a Christian puts on the old man, he becomes flesh.

In the wicked, the heart is desperately corrupt and their spirit is dead towards God. They do not function like men as God intended; they are sub-human and follow the devil.

They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. 2 Pt 2:14

When a man is regenerated two things happened to him; he is given a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 11:19, 18:31, 36:26). The spirit that was dead is renewed by the Holy Spirit and enabled to communicate with God. A new heart is given which is pure. The Christian is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17) which must involve a new heart, the engine room of the personality.

Thus the old nature resides in the old heart, which is not destroyed until the end. We must either teach this or teach that we have one heart which constantly needs cleansing being one minute pure and the next evil. However, when the heart is pure where is the old nature; we know that it has not gone since it grows in corruption until the end (Eph 4:22). The only explanation is that there is a pure heart and a wicked heart manifesting the old and new natures.

The heart in the Christian, as I said, is the gateway between the soul and spirit. It comprises chiefly of two faculties, the conscience and the higher mind (the *nous*). The conscience is in the spirit and the *nous* is in the soul; thus the heart straddles the spirit and soul. The lower mind (the *dianoia*) is also in the soul. [There are no Hebrew terms equivalent to these which is why it is more general in the use of the terms.]

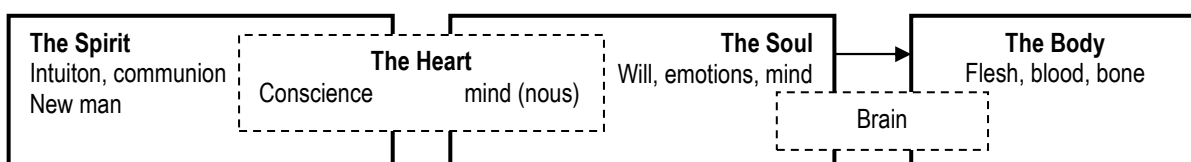
To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind [nous] and conscience are defiled. Titus 1:15

This is the case of the wicked, whose spirit is dead towards God, their heart is corrupt which contains a defiled conscience and a defiled higher mind.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Heb 10:22

Here the believer has a true heart (suggesting that there can be a false one), the conscience within it has been cleansed.

Thus the human being is chiefly composed of three inter-linked organs; the link between soul and spirit is the heart; the link between the soul and the body is the brain:





The need to deny the old nature

Now there is much more that could be said if we were writing a paper analysing human nature, but that is not our remit here. What is of chief importance is to understand that the old nature is constantly active, growing in corruption and must be resisted by self-denial.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.' Matt 16:24-25

This self-denial is a denial of the heart that would lead us to sin. It is a denial of ourselves, a denial of our old life. This is repeatedly stated by Christ,

And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. Matt 10:38-39

When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, 'Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.' Mk 8:34-35

Then He said to *them* all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.' Lk 9:23-24

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Jn 12:24-25

Now whether you accept my analysis of soul and spirit or not is irrelevant since the import of self-denial is unequivocally stated and this self-denial is of our heart. Hating your own life is denying your wicked heart. However, it is better to understand man's composition and better deal with the rising of sin.

Thus the progress of sin is this:

1. There are temptations and enticements outside the body which enter through the senses; plus there are temptations that arise directly in the mind from demonic actions. ['Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.' Jm 1:14. 'For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it.' 1 Jn 2:16-17]
2. These vie for control of the human heart. ['Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.' Prov 4:23]
3. The new man resides in the human spirit and tells the soul/body to do good. ['The spirit indeed is willing.' Matt 26:41]
4. However, tempted by lust the old man controls the heart. The heart, filled with lust, then wages war against the soul seeking to dominate it and tempt it away from the direction given by the new man. ['fleshly lusts which war against the soul.' 1 Pt 2:11]
5. The soul submits to the direction of the lustful heart. At this point the person becomes flesh (carnal). ['I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal.' 1 Cor 3:1; 'his fleshly mind.' Col 2:18] This is subjective sin.
6. The soul directs the body to act according to the lust in the heart. This gives birth to objective sin.

For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Rm 7:19-23

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ... For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ... the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ... Therefore, brethren, we are debtors -- not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ... For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. Rm 8:1-13

Errors made in this

Now because of confusion in the matter of soul and spirit many preachers have made serious errors regarding where sin is, where the old nature resides.

Some Reformed men place sin in the body since they recognise that the soul is a vessel for personality but deny the separate function of the human soul from the spirit and have no clue where the heart is. Since they can't put sin in the spirit/soul, the only place left is the body.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was guilty of this and made a serious error in his exposition of Romans 6 in stating that sin lies in the body because the old man has gone.²² This is an old error, which in the dark ages led to men afflicting themselves with whips to drive out sin; it results in asceticism. Lloyd-Jones was not an advocate of asceticism but his teaching on this was very confused because he denied that there are two natures in man. If an active old nature is denied then sin has to be placed somewhere and Lloyd-Jones put it in the body. He defended this by referring to the 'body of sin' (Rm 6:6).²³ He failed to see that 'body of sin' refers to the result of the workings of an evil heart; the body is a neutral vessel obeying the instructions of the soul and the heart. It is the heart where evil originates according to Jesus, not the body. It is shocking to say, but unequivocal, that Lloyd-Jones was confused about sanctification. Indeed, he denies that Romans 6 is about sanctification, thus alienating himself from almost every major Reformed expositor. Perhaps this is what led to his further confusion about the baptism in the Spirit he developed later.

Others have put the old nature in the soul. But if the soul is destroyed as the seat of sin, then the person is also destroyed since it is the seat of personality. The soul is the real person. The soul is a neutral vessel, like the body, which obeys the commands of the heart / spirit.

Mystics try to achieve perfection by denying both their bodies and their souls. They fast and weaken their body and they try to eliminate their feelings and mental faculties in order to become passive and thus find unity with God. Mystics put sin in the soul [or self] which must be annihilated and shut down by induced passivity. All they are doing is damaging

²² 'The old man ... is non-existent, he is no longer there. If you are a Christian, the man you were in Adam has gone out of existence; he has no reality at all.' *Exposition of Romans 6, The New Man*, Banner of Truth (1975), p65. His false exposition led to amazing wrong statements such as, 'Let us never again try to get rid of the old man; he has gone.' (ibid.). This contradicts many clear apostolic statements such as Eph 4:22-24; Rm 8:13; Col 3:5; which Lloyd-Jones wrongly expounds. He also has no explanation for the commands of Jesus to take up the cross and lose our life (e.g. Matt 10:38-39), which according to him, has already been lost and is no longer there.

²³ Lloyd-Jones, op. cit. p72.

the organs God gave them to function as people. Fellowship with God is in the spirit and does not require mystical disciplines but obedience to the truth.

Some Charismatics put sin in the spirit, which then needs exorcism of demons. This is guilt transference; human sin is blamed upon demons instead of the individual repenting and fighting it.

God created man as spirit, soul and body and these were all for God's use to express his glory; thus they are not intrinsically evil. At the glory, man will express God in spirit, soul and body on the new earth and 1 Thess 5:23 shows that God sanctifies all three; these are all neutral vessels to be used by God.

It is crucial to understand that the old nature is not in the body, neither is it in the soul. I do not have to destroy my life in order to become more holy. Wickedness lies in the heart and the mind must be renewed and the old nature put off in order to become holy. This is effectively putting on the new man or living with a cleansed new heart.

Thus the old nature is not the soul or the body. It is the principle of an Adamic sinful heart. When the soul or body submits to this evil nature it becomes flesh, the expression of sin opposed to the Spirit. The expression of the vessel is flesh if it submits to sin but righteous if it submits to God (Rm 6:13). The fall brought sin into man's nature so that man now expresses evil in each compartment/organ of his life. Dominated by a wicked heart, man expresses evil thoughts, wicked feelings, false ideas and commits sinful acts with his body.

Keeping free from sin

Having understood the basic theology of sin, what steps do we take to avoid committing it?

Renew the mind

The mind in the heart needs to be fed from God's word. Failing to feed your mind will result in a vacuum which the devil will seek to fill with vain imaginations. The renewal of the mind is directly associated with putting on the new man. When we put on Christ we renew the mind. When we earnestly study God's word we are feeding our mind with Christ.

Holiness is not a matter of mere effort; there are many preparations required in the process. The first of these is to renew the mind and fill it with God's truth. The truth sets us free and the more truth we understand, the more free we will be from the devil's deceptions.

This means that we must also be growing in theological understanding. We need to constantly grow in understanding more about God and more able to systematise and summarise Biblical teaching. The believer that grows in holiness will also be growing in knowledge.

Listen to and obey your conscience

The conscience is the representative of God's law in the heart; it convicts the person of sin when it is committed or considered. However, the conscience must be taught by God's word. The conscience of some people is poorly taught and damaged through lack of feeding or legalism and convicts people when they have done no wrong. If men impose their own authoritarian ideas upon gullible sensitive people, their consciences can convict them because they have not followed the man properly. This is not Godliness but men-fearing.

The conscience can also become seared. This occurs when sin has become habitual and constant and the continual ignoring of the conscience results in it becoming damaged. It no longer functions because it has no sensitivity.

However, a conscience that is fed upon God's word and obeyed becomes very sensitive to sin, and increases in this sensitivity. Thus believers should always listen to their conscience and obey it.

Put on new man / Put off old man

We have discussed this sufficiently. This is the essence of progressive sanctification.

... who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness 1 Pt 2:24

Living for righteousness requires first dying to sin.

Prayer

Sanctification is becoming more like God my Father. Thus talking constantly to my Father will greatly help me to understand him and know what he wants from me. A constant prayer life is vital to achieve this.

Discipline (create habits)

Godly disciplines greatly help to avoid sin. They prepare the person to walk the right way by first concentrating upon God. For instance, praying first thing in the morning and last thing at night helps set the mind in a God-ward direction. Giving thanks for all things through the day helps the believer realise that he is constantly in God's hands. Having a proper quiet time, studying the Bible and applying it through prayer, help sets the believer on the right track and feeds his spirit.

Another key habit is to immediately deal with sin when it occurs. Don't wait until you feel less awful; don't feel that you cannot approach God fresh from sin; come immediately to God and deal with it.

Don't conform to the world and sin

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, *as* in your ignorance; but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.' 1 Pt 1:13-16

Christians must gird up their minds, that is, control them and get them ready for holiness. This means that they must control what is placed in the mind. Believers should filter what goes in through the eyes, ears and mouth. The things in this world will lead the individual towards sin, so the believer must take great care in what he submits to. Always bear in mind that the Holy Spirit is in your heart and shares what you admit into it.

Now many Christian teachers will advocate not watching TV, not listening to music, not looking at art, not seeing movies and so forth – but these same people condone ambition in ministry or do not condemn slander of speech, which are just as worldly. All of us must come to a point where we can effectively make sound choices for ourselves. Some people can watch a certain movie without sin, others with a more sensitive conscience are troubled by it. We must each make our own decisions in the light of God's word.

Live in fear of offending God

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear. 1 Pt 1:17

There is a good fear and a bad fear regarding serving God, just as Peter also talks about a good fear and a bad fear in a wife towards her husband. The godly wife is a good illustration of living in reverent fear towards God. It is not total subjection, it is not being scared, it is not living in dread and it is not quivering in horror and panic. Yet it is living in a fear of failing to give honour where it is due or failing to be obedient or failing to comply with the role God has given me.

Fear of sinning against God is a good thing and is one motivation towards an obedient life.

Repentance

These all represent continual repentance. Repentance is not confession; it is not morbid self-accusation; it is choosing to follow Christ. Repentance is setting the direction of your life heavenwards instead of earthbound. It is the putting on of the new man and living from a purified heart. It is putting off the mind of the flesh and putting on the renewed mind.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that modern Christians have little idea about the seriousness of sin, neither do they see it as an important Biblical doctrine. Yet this matter is absolutely crucial to living a fruitful Christian life. If you don't understand sin and how to deal with it, you will ruin your testimony and be of no use to God.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2011
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>