

WHAT DID JESUS SAY? PART 2 ABOUT SIN

“Eve Knew Her Apples”

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Luke 11:13

“If ye then being evil . . .” Jesus was more realistic about our human nature than many of us are willing to be. We have heard so much about the “escalator-theory” of man-- that he is forever progressing upward and onward--that it goes against our grain to be told we are sinners. Yet that is precisely what Jesus meant when he said, “If ye then being evil . . .”

A generation or two ago we would have argued, “It just ain't so! It's all a myth. Let's be done with this childish nonsense.” After all, didn't Spinoza, the great philosopher, announce in his Ethics, “Evil is nothing positive”? Yes, the era through which we have just past refused to acknowledge the presence and power of sin.

But all that has changed. In the interim, two great earthshattering wars, a spiraling inflation on one hand and a disastrous depression on the other, plus a some general loosening of the moral fiber our nation have worked together to alter our outlook. And, as a result, our generation is a bit more honest about the nature of man than folks were even twenty years ago. We are ready now to admit to a sense of sin. But even so, we prefer to make as little of it has possible. When we talk about sin, we speak in a whisper and discuss the issue with an air of sophistication that makes it seem harmless.

Dean Harry Kruener, of Denison University, tells about one Midwestern college that advertised to the parents of its students that “our campus is located seven miles from any known form of sin.” Well, we can smile, but as Dean Kruener points out, it's not quite that easy. We may think of sin as something out there somewhere... a comfortable distance away... but in reality we cannot escape it for it's within us.

Little by little our generation is moving away from the cheery humanism of a generation ago with its happy-go-lucky attitude toward the world's great pain. We are gradually gaining the maturity to face up to stern reality and admit that we are sinners. This doesn't mean we have become morbid or negative, it simply means that at last we are ready to hear and accept the truth. As Henry Van Dike succinctly said, “It is better to be sobered by the saddest fact than to be deluded by the merriest lie.”

The interesting thing about all this is that the leaders of this return to reality are coming from most unexpected quarters. Harry Emerson Fosdick, who could hardly be called a conservative, is one of these. In a recent sermon entitled The Rediscovery of Sin Fosdick says, “Today, we and our hopes and all our efforts after goodness are up against a powerful antagonism, something tragic and terrific in human nature that turns our loveliest qualities to evil and our finest endeavors into failure. Our fathers called that sin. If you have a better name for it, use it, but recognize that realistic fact!”

The poet, Auden, tells us, “This is an age that has known the distance of God more than any other.” I don't think I've heard of more orthodox definition of sin than that, “istance from God.”

Writers like T. S. Elliott... educators like President Pusey of Harvard...scientists, engineers, economists, businessman, politicians... are all asking us in one-way or another to face up to the problem of sin.

Dr. Robert Oppenheimer frankly admits that as he watched the first atomic explosion he had “something like a sense of sin.” Someone has suggested that perhaps that's one reason why he was demoted. It must have been annoying to have at the head of our munitions race a man who had too much of a sense of sin.

Be that as it may, I think there is a growing sensitivity to the fact that --

Sin Is Real And Something Ought To Be Done About It.

That's what Jesus has been saying all along: sin is real and I have come to do something about it. He never underestimated man, but neither did he over rate him. He pointed out that the soul of a man is worth more than all the treasures of the earth. But he also asserted that man is lost and away from God. “If ye then being evil . . .” he said. Jesus never gave credence to the popular notion that basically man is not a sinner but just a “slightly undeveloped saint.”

A little boy was asked by his Sunday School teacher to write an essay on king David. He scratched around for something to say and then finally wrote, “David was a good and a rich King. If there was anything wrong with him, it was a slight tendency to adultery.”

And, of course, that's what we would like to think sin is, “a slight tendency,” “a psychological quirk,” “one of those little things which will take care of itself in the end.” But Jesus said, No! Sin is real. Men are lost. They are away from God. And that is the cause of the giant ache in human hearts.

Now when Jesus talked about sin, he meant something far more fundamental than that which the world usually calls sin. To Jesus sin was more than a violation of certain taboos or engaging in certain improper acts.

He saw sin as a basic attitude of the heart, a willful act of rebellion, idolatry in the crudest form in which man puts himself in the center of things, and lives his life as if there were no God. This is what Jesus meant by sin, a deliberate choice on the part of man whereby he rules God out of his life.

If sin were merely ignoring certain standards and taboos, a breaking of the mores of society, then redemption would be relatively simple. We could enter a monastery or convent and get away from it all. We could enroll in that university Dean Kruener spoke about and get “seven miles away from the nearest source of sin” and feel quite smug about it. But sin is on a much deeper level than that. It is something within us. An attitude of the heart and will.

I like the story about old Mose who was a Godless slave on one of the old Southern plantations. He liked to boast that he could run away any time he chose. One time he even set the date. But the night came and went and Mose stayed on. His friends began to kid him about his failure to carry out his boast. His answer went something like this, “I just got thinkin’ that if I did runaway, I’d have to take old Mose along, and I thought I might as well stay right here.” Exactly! Mose was a smart man. He knew his worst slavery was within and he could not escape it by running away.

And, to our credit, *we* are rediscovering a sense of sin. But that is not enough, for our most thoughtful leaders are saying our greatest need is not to regain a sense of sin, but to regain

A Sense Of The Horror Of Sin.

Dr. Clarence W. Cranford, the president of our American Baptist Convention, recently completed his 25th year in the ministry. In a sermon he preached on that occasion, he confessed that 25 years ago he was rather optimistic about the future. He says, “I under estimated the power of sin and over estimated the intellectual ability of mankind. I thought surely that before we got this far along in my ministry, we would have made this a much more decent world in which to live. But I didn’t realize how utterly awful sin is. Sin isn’t just an act; it’s an attitude. And that sin is putting yourself ahead of God and making yourself a kind of God instead of letting him run your life.”

Thank God more and more people are beginning to feel like Dr. Cranford. We are awakening to the fact that sin has left man utterly bankrupt. Without being morbid or gloomy, we are ready now to acknowledge the horror of sin and what it has done to us and to others and to God.

What Sin Does To Us

There is no more forceful illustration of the devastating effect of sin upon an individual than that which is in the story of the painting of Leonardo Da Vinci’s great masterpiece, “The Last Supper.”

For many months the artist sought a model for his Christ. “I must find a young man of pure life,” he declared, “only then can I get the look on the face I want.” One day while he was worshipping in one of the old churches of Rome, he noticed a young man singing in the choir. His name was Pietro Bandinelli. After studying his beautiful countenance, Leonardo exclaimed, “I have found the face I want.” And he invited Pietro Bandinelli to be the model for his painting of Christ.

Well, a masterpiece is not completed in a moment. A number of years passed and still the great painting, “The Last Supper” was not finished. The eleven faithful apostles had all been sketched on the wall, but the artist had difficulty in finding a model for his Judas. “I must find a man whose face is hardened and distorted,” he said. “A debased man whose features are stamped with the ravages only a wicked heart can produce.” And so he began to search along the back roads of Rome hoping he would stumble across some a wretched creature who could be his Judas.

One day he found him. A beggar in rags, whose face was a sneering leer. For a small pittance the beggar agreed to become his model. One day, when the painting was almost completed, Leonardo Da Vinci turned to his model and said, “I don't even know your name. Who are you, sir?” The man replied, “My name is Pietro Bandinelli. I am the man who also sat as your model for Christ.” He had made bad choices which led him into a life of sin and the horrors of sin had taken their toll. The face which had been so sweet it was the inspiration for Leonardo's face of Christ, was now so disfigured by sin it became the face of Judas.

But the horror of sin does not end with what it does to us, there is also

The Terrible Effect Of Sin Upon Others.

Dr. E. Stanley Jones tells of a man who was converted through his missionary work in India. The man was a government official and quite often was called away from home. On one of his trips he was tempted and fell into infidelity and shame. As time went on, the burden of his guilt tormented him. One day he called his wife into the room and began unfolding the whole wretched story. As

the meaning of his words dawned upon her, she turned pale as death, staggered against the wall and, with tears rolling down her cheeks, cowered in a corner as though she had been beaten with a whip. “In that moment,” he said afterward, “I saw the meaning of the cross. I saw love crucified by sin.” And for him, it was a moment of punishment no prison could bring.

But the real curse and horror of sin cannot be measured by what it does to ourselves or even by what it does to others. It’s real horror is

What Sin Does To God.

Our finite minds are really at a loss to comprehend the staggering implications of it all. At best, like Paul, we “see through a glass darkly.”

I think J. B. Phillips comes about as close as anyone with his illustration of a man who is something of a cartoonist. One day, for the amusement of his friends, he dashes off a bright, gaudy, little caricature of life on a piece of canvas fastened to a wall. Stepping back to see his handy work better he discovers his little bit of nonsense has been scribbled on the corner of a vast painting of superb quality, a work of art so huge he had not realized there *was* a painting there. Suddenly, he realizes he has wrecked a glorious work of art.

He could not possibly feel worse and yet what is the cartoonist’s silly doodling upon a beautiful painting compared to the effect of sin upon the sweeping majesty of God’s design for life?

Do you see then, the shallowness of the common attitude that God doesn’t really care what we do? That he will cheerfully pat sinners on the back and say, “There, there! You didn’t mean it. It doesn’t really matter.” Because it does matter! It matters terribly.

Sin is more than an infraction of the rules. “It is a moral twist in human life,” “a downward bent in human nature,” “a seeping poison” which sends its contamination into every area of life, “a willful act of rebellion against God” which is the result of our own deliberate choice.

Isaiah 53:6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his *own* way . . .” It is a matter of choice you see. A lot of people blame God for the agonies of the world. “It's his fault,” they argue. “He made us like we are.” Like Adam, who blamed his sin on Eve, and Eve who blamed her sin on the serpent, they blame their sin on God. But every sin is an act of rebellion. Every sin is a deliberate choice.

Eve was not beguiled. She knew what she was doing. She understood the consequences of her act. God had said, “Of this tree you shall not eat, lest you die.”

Eve Knew Her Apples but she sinned anyway! In the face of God's warning she deliberately disobeyed. It was the same with the sin of Adam and Cain and Noah and Joshua and David. As a result, the judgment of God fell upon them.

And it's the same with us. No one is ever condemned to hell because of the sin of Adam. There is a difference between original sin and original guilt. The cross of Christ took care of the curse of original guilt. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” We are no longer guilty because of the sin of the first man.

It is our *own* sin... our *own* deliberate turning away from God... our *own* willful rebellion against the claims of God upon our life. *This* is the sin which damns us and with which we now must reckon.

Yes, Eve Knew Her Apple and so do we. Even as she was lost through an act of deliberate choice... so, too, we are lost. Not through some breach of morals, some sensual act, some dishonest deed, but through the supreme idolatry of life in which we deliberately deny God, and put ourselves in the place that is rightfully his. But thank God, that's not the whole story.

Jesus Did Not Stop At Saying We Are Sinners.

He went on to say there is hope. There is a longing in the heart to be at peace with God. The image of the Divine in man may be marred and broken, but it is never completely destroyed. Even a prodigal son, who has rejected his father's love and squandered his life in riotous living, can “come to himself,” as Jesus said. And if he will rise up and go to his father and say, “I have sinned,” in that moment of contrition he will know the love and forgiveness of his God.

Sin is real. Men are lost. But that is not all. There is also the cross. If men will respond to it, there is salvation and eternal life.

In October of 1954 I use this illustration, but with your permission I would like to use it again this morning. You will remember reading in Sunday School the famous story of Faust. He was the one, you will recall, who gamble with his soul. A European artist has painted a picture depicting his tragic experience.

He portrays it has a game of chess. Faust is on one side. Satan on the other. The game is just about over and Faust has only a few pieces left. A king, a knight and one or two pawns. On his face is a look of utter despair. While on the other side of the board, the devil leers in anticipation of his coming triumph.

Many chess players had looked at the painting and agreed the position of Faust is hopeless. It is checkmate. But one day a great master of the game came to the art gallery and was drawn immediately to this particular work of art. He was fascinated by the look of despair on the face of Faust. Then, after a while, his gaze went to the pieces on the board. He stared at them completely absorbed. Other visitors to the gallery came and went and still he studied on, lost in contemplation. Then suddenly the gallery was startled by a ringing shout, “It's a lie!” he cried. “The king and the knight have another move!”

Beloved, that is the story of Christianity. That is our blessed hope. We are sinners... yes. We are lost and apart from God... yes. But regardless of how hopeless our position appears on the surface, we have another move. There is still the cross to contend with, “for God so loved the

world . . .”

Eve Knew Her Apples! And so you. By choice you turned from God. By choice you may now accept him. The King has made his move. He has given you his son. The next move is up to you.