



Oceanside URC—Wednesday School of Theology

Holiness #2

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Sin is lawlessness. (1 John 3:1b)

*All page numbers are from J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (London: William Hunt and Company, 1879).

Chapter 1: “Sin”

“He must dig down very low if he would build high...a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity...The first thing, there, that God does when he makes any one a new creature in Christ, is to send the light into his heart, and show him that he is a guilty sinner.” (1)

- What is the relationship between sin and sanctification?

(1)—Definition of Sin

A twofold definition:

1. Original sin [“sin”]

“Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk) but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always against the spirit; and, therefore, in every person borne into the world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation.” (Thirty-Nine Articles, art. 9)

- See also *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q&A 3–8; *Belgic Confession*, art. 14–15; *Canons of Dort*, 3/4.1–3
- Why do we need to believe and know we have “original sin?”

2. Actual sin [“a sin”]

“...doing, saying, thinking, or imagining, anything that is not in perfect conformity with the mind and law of God...The slightest outward or inward departure from absolute mathematical parallelism with God’s revealed will and character constitutes a sin, and at once makes us guilty in God’s sight.” (2)

- How can the distinction between sins of commission and sins of omission help us in witnessing and apologetics?

- What does this twofold definition of sin mean for our holiness?

(2)– *Origin of Sin*

- Are we sinners because we imitate our first parents, Adam and Eve, or because we inherit sin from our first parents?
- In other words, are we sinners because we sin, or do we sin because we are sinners?
- In the church circles we may have come from, what teaching/emphasis, if any, was there on this origin of sin?

(3)– *Extent of Sin*

“Sin is a disease which pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds. The understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers, the will, are all more or less infected.” (5)

- See texts such as Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9
- What does this mean for us when we think of things like politics, the arts, and the sciences?
- What does Ryle say is “the greatest proof of the extent and power of sin?” (7)
- What does this extent of sin mean for our holiness?

(4)– *Guilt of Sin*

- How does our sinfulness affect our ability to discern our sinfulness? (8)
- What does Ryle’s list of verses teach us? (9)
- What is Ryle best “proof of the fullness of sin?” (9)

(5)—Deceitfulness of Sin [Heb. 3:13]

“Sin rarely seems sin at its first beginnings.” (11)

- In what way does sin deceive you in terms of your relationship to God? In terms of your relationships with others? In terms of your life goals?

Ryle goes on to give two observations [applications] of this:

1. Humiliation (11–13)

- One of the ways Ryle says we can learn and practice humiliation is in the prayers of confession in the *Book of Common Prayer* [there are three great ones: at the beginning of Morning/Evening Prayer, before Holy Communion, and much of The Litany]. How can we utilize ancient prayers, and those we use in worship today, outside of worship?
- How have you experienced what Ryle says: “...the more light we have [about the Word and Christian doctrine], the more we see our own sinfulness; the nearer we get to heaven, the more we are clothed with humility.” (12–13)

2. Thankfulness (13–14)

- Notice the comprehensive description of the “medicine” of the gospel (13).

Practical Uses [remember the Puritans!]

1. “...a Scriptural view of sin is one of the best antidotes to that vague, dim, misty, hazy kind of theology” (14).

- Note the wonderful paragraph on the law and grace (14–15).

2. “...a Scriptural view of sin is one of the best antidotes to the extravagantly broad and liberal theology” (15).

3. “...a right view of sin is the best antidote to that sensuous, ceremonial, formal kind of Christianity” (16).

4. “...a right view of sin is one of the best antidotes to the overstrained theories of Perfection” (17).

5. "...a Scriptural view of sin will prove an admirable antidote to the low views of personal holiness" (18).

"The cure for Evangelical Churchman, I am convinced, is to be found in a clearer apprehension of the nature and sinfulness of sin. We need not go back to Egypt, and borrow semi-Romish practices in order to revive our spiritual life. We need not restore the confessional, or return to monasticism or asceticism. Nothing of the kind! We must simply repent and do our first works. We must return to first principles. We must go back to 'the old paths.' We must sit down humbly in the presence of God, look the whole subject in the face, examine clearly what the Lord Jesus calls sin, and what the Lord Jesus calls 'doing His will.' We must then try to realize that it is terribly possible to live a careless, easy-going, half-worldly life, and yet at the same time to maintain Evangelical principles and call ourselves Evangelical people!" (19–20)