

Have you seen the new lighting in the kitchen? It is really bright in there. You can absolutely see what you are doing! There is one problem with better lighting, however. The better lighting makes all of the wear-and-tear and blemishes easier to see. The brighter the light, the more glaring are the imperfections.

The same is true spiritually speaking. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. But the light that God is exposes the darkness of human beings. In the light of God's holiness the sinfulness of humanity is clearly seen. It is also apparent that holiness cannot remain holiness and be favorable toward that which is not holy. God is holy and his standard is holiness. Jesus declared in the sermon on the mount, "You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

So herein lies a very great problem. Human beings are grossly imperfect. We are not holy. We are sinful. We must somehow obtain holiness if we are to avoid being justly condemned to an eternity of God's holiness in action against us in the form of wrath. We need sanctification! And rightly understanding this need and its provision from God demands that we correctly grasp our sinfulness.

The first chapter of J. C. Ryle's book about sanctification, called *Holiness*, focuses on sin. He starts with these words: "He that wishes to obtain right views about Christian holiness must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of sin. He must dig down very low if he would build high. A mistake here is most mischievous." God being our helper, tonight our objective is to make sure we go deep in grasping the basic aspects of sin. And we pray it will contribute to our possession of right ideas about sanctification.

### **1. What is Sin?**

**1 John 3:4 – "Sin is lawlessness."**

**Psalm 51 – transgressions, iniquity, sin, doing what is evil in God's sight, incurs the righteous judgment of God**

**Matthew 5:21 – "whoever will be angry with his brother will be liable to judgment."**

**Matthew 5:28 – "everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."**

Ryle says sin "consists in 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)

Kenneth Prior points out that since "God's law is the standard by which we are judged[,] sin is not simply a failure to live according to our ability, but a failure to conform to God's revealed will an purpose. The world tells us to do our best, with the assurance that no one can do more. This may be so, but our best is still a long way short of God's commandment, and it is his standard which counts" (*The Way of Holiness*, 32).

- The law shows us we are sinners (Romans 3:20; 4:15; 5:13; 1 Timothy 1:8-11).
- Sin is committed not only in outward acts and outward words but also inward thoughts.
- Sin is not only doing what ought not to be done but also not doing what ought to be. (Matthew 25:31-36—those on the left were neglectful.)
- Sin is committed even when you lack knowledge. (Hidden faults – Ps. 19:12; Lev. 4-5; Number 15:27-29; Luke 12:48)

## 2. Where does sin come from?

Romans 5:12

Psalm 51:5

Sin is not the result of bad upbringing. It is not a sickness caused by a germ that enters the spirit from the outside. It is not the imitation of a bad example. It arises out of a defective nature that is inherent in humanity. It is an inheritance from our first father, Adam. We are sinners from conception and sin from our birth. Sinfulness is our nature (Ephesians 2:3). Sinful is a condition we became with Adam in his sin. Personally, therefore, we commit sins because we are sinners. Our sins reflect who we already are.

## 3. The Result of Sin.

There are three ramifications of our sinfulness and our sin.

Debt; Defilement; Damnation

Crime; Corruption; Condemnation

Pile; Polluted; Punishment

The first two words in each line refer to the consequences of sin for ourselves and the third word refers to God's obligation due us out of his holiness because of the first two.

## **Sin as Debt – an accumulation of sinful acts requiring legal payment**

The Garden of Eden – in the day you eat of it, you will die ... “Because you have listened”

The Lord’s Proclamation – Ex. 34:6-7 – forgiving iniquity, by no means clearing the guilty

The Old Testament sacrificial system – blood atones cf. propitiation (1 J 2:2; 4:10; Ro 3)

Parable of Two Debtors – Luke 7:41-50

Parable of the Unforgiving Servant – Matthew 18:23-38

The Disciples’ Prayer – Matthew 6:12

The Wages of Sin – Romans 6:23

The whole idea of the enforcement of the law is that law-breaking demands punitive consequences. The OT law called for such in the case of the breaking of God’s law.

Hell itself is evidence of the debt owed to God by sinners. “They will be there until they have paid the last cent.”

Satisfaction – Isaiah 53 – our iniquity placed on Christ; satisfaction occurs out of the anguish of his soul.

The proclamation of Christ in the cross – “It is finished”

## **Sin as Defilement – a condition of spiritual corruption**

Jesus – Matthew 15:17-20. What is on the inside defiles. Out of the heart comes evil

Jeremiah 17:9 – The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick

Genesis 6:5 – every intention of the thoughts of his heart was ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY

Isaiah 1:5-6 – the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint, from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.”

Isaiah 64:6 – our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment

John 3:19-20 – People love darkness rather than light

Romans 8:7 – the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God

Ephesians 2:1-3 – people are dead in transgressions and sin

Ephesians 4:17-19 – futility, darkened, alienated, ignorant, hard heart, callous, impurity

1 Corinthians 2:14 – natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 – Gospel is veiled by the blinding of the minds

Ryle: “The disease may be veiled under a thin covering of courtesy, politeness, good manners and outward decorum, but it lies deep down in the constitution.” (4)

## **Conclusion**

At the end of the day we cannot help ourselves. Face to face with the holiness of God, our sinfulness condemns us absolutely. We need sanctification (holiness) of position before the judge (justification). And we need sanctification of our defiled being

(sanctification proper). Jesus died for both. Prior writes, "it is as much the purpose of God to save us from . . . defilement as it is to remove our guilt. God does not justify a person so that he or she can continue to live in sin with impunity. ...God does not save us in sin, but from sin."

In the future we will consider sanctification of position and then look intently and extensively at sanctification of our defilement.

### **Practical Implications**

A proper sense of the sinfulness of man is requisite for understanding sanctification.

1. DESPERATION. How great is our need for mercy! The publican in Jesus parable (Luke 18:13). David's confession in Psalm 51:1. The gift of sanctification is God's merciful work through Christ. Positionally and experientially. (Blot out my sins; Hide your face from my sins; create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.)

2. Demeanor. The sacrifices in which God delights are not polluted sacrifices but a broken spirit and a contrite heart that seeks mercy and forgiveness and a clean heart. The heart of the saint (holy one) wants sanctification. He wants forgiveness but he also wants holiness. When we see ourselves for who we are as sinners in contrast to the holiness of God, our brokenness should be like that of Isaiah. Woe is me. This is why we must come to Jesus. Without him we are justly and eternally fit only for divine justice.

3. DETERMINATION. But an accurate view of our sin against the background of God's holiness will spur us toward enthusiastic and determined pursuit of personal holiness, looking to Jesus.