

Bible Texts for Sin Examined

by Daniel Steele

The Bible teaches that it is possible to live without sin through the power of Christ's grace, and that the ideal Christian life is one of freedom from sin and service to God.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Topics: "Original Sin", "Christian Perfection"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the controversy surrounding sin, emphasizing that sin refers to willful transgressions of God's known law and original sin. He challenges the notion that sin in the human soul honors Christ, stating that Jesus came to save people from sin, and believers are to reflect His moral excellence. Steele refutes the idea that sin is necessary for humility, highlighting that perfect love for Christ leads to perfect lowliness. He clarifies misconceptions about sin in the heart by examining various Bible passages and debunking misinterpretations, ultimately asserting that complete deliverance from sin is attainable through the fullness of God's love and Spirit.

Transcript

Much of the controversy about sin results from the want of accuracy in the definition of this term. We do not in this chapter include in sin the involuntary deviations from the law of absolute right, but willful transgressions of the known law of God, written in his word or on the tables of the heart, and also original or inbred sin.

Living without sin are words which shock many persons. It seems to them to be plucking the crown from the head of Christ, the only sinless man who ever walked the earth, and putting that crown upon the heads of men. But let us see whether sin in the human soul really honors or dishonors Christ. What was the great errand of Jesus into the world? To save his people from their sins. So far, then, as he does not save from sin, his mission is a dishonorable failure. He came to create the believer anew, making him a new creature. So much of the old man of sin as appears to stain and corrupt this new creature' reflects discredit upon "Him that begetteth." "Ye are his workmanship." The work testifies of the skill or of the incompetency of the artist. Will any one insist that sin is a beauty and not a blemish in the work of the Divine Sculptor? In his prayer, which has been appropriately styled his high-priestly address to his Father, Jesus says respecting his disciples, "I am glorified in them." Does Christ's glory consist in sin, reflected from his followers? St John said of the Logos, who became flesh and dwelt among us, that we beheld his glory -- not a material resplendence, not worldly wealth, nor rank, nor fame, nor genius, but moral excellence,

fullness of "grace and truth." These qualities in believing hearts glorify Christ. Sin is not only a shame to any people, but a shame to the God of any people. Jesus therefore, is not jealous of the believer who through the power of his grace, has complete victory over inward sin, and perfect cleansing from outward defilement, but he rejoices in the honor which his perfect work reflects upon his workmanship. He is not afraid that he who wears the robe of his righteousness will outshine himself, and appropriate his honors. Sin might do this, but holiness never.

But is not sin in the heart necessary to keep the soul humble? Will not spiritual pride lift itself up as soon as sin is destroyed? As well might you ask whether a man would not lift up his head haughtily when his neck has been broken. The Holy Spirit, taking complete possession of the heart, not only breaks the neck of sin, but casts out this strong man, leaving no seed of pride behind. Perfect love to Christ is perfect lowliness. When it is demonstrated that men must drink a little whiskey daily in order to temperance, -- steal a trifling amount every day in order to be honest, -- tell a few fibs every twenty four hours in order to be truthful, -- and occasionally violate the seventh commandment that they may maintain their purity, -- then we will sit down and soberly answer the objection that a little nest-egg of sin in the heart is a necessary nucleus about which all the Christian virtues are to be gathered. But does not the Bible flatly contradict this doctrine, that the freedom which Jesus, the great Emancipator, bestows, includes grace to live without sinning? Did not Solomon, in prayer at the dedication of the temple, (2 Chron. 6:36,) tell Jehovah that "there is no man which sinneth not?" And does he not repeat this declaration in Eccles. 7:20, "For there is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not?" We answer that Solomon, when correctly interpreted, as he is in the Vulgate, the Septuagint, and most of the ancient versions, gives no countenance to sin. These all read, "May not sin." The Hebrew language, having no potential mode, uses the indicative future instead. The context must determine the real meaning. The context is nonsense in King James' version, using an if where there is no room for a condition -- "if any man sin, for every man sins." Let me illustrate the absurdity of this translation.

At the laying of a cornerstone of a State lunatic asylum the Governor, in his address, is made by the reporter to say, "If any person in the commonwealth is insane for every person is insane -- let him come here and be cared for." We should all correct the blundering reporter, and say may become insane, instead of is insane, in order to make the Governor talk sense. Correct the reporter, or translator, rather, of Solomon, and let him talk sense also, and you will hear him say, If any man sin, for there is no one who is impeccable, who may not sin. This criticism applies to the quotation from the Ecclesiastes, also. But does not St. James say, (3:2,) "For in many things we offend all?" Who are the we? Is it St. James and the rest of the apostles? Then these excellent men, after blessing God, fall to cursing men. See ninth verse. But if the we is used for men generally, the difficulty vanishes. That it is so used read the entire verse, and note the exception to the general offending, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." But the plea for continuing in sin has one more proof-text, (1 John 1:8) "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." This means if we have never sinned, and so have no need of the blood of Jesus Christ, spoken of in the previous verse. The tenth verse reiterates and explains the eighth: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." This explanation harmonizes perfectly with John's strong assertion, that "whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin," that is, known and willful sin. The incorrect interpretation of the eighth verse, which makes every believer in Christ a constant sinner, is in direct collision with the asserted victory over sin, enjoyed by every one born of God.

After this removal of misconceptions arising from misinterpreted Scriptures, we proceed to demonstrate the same doctrine of a complete deliverance from sin, by referring the reader to those passages which enjoin on the believer the possession of the fullness of the Divine love, and the fullness of the Spirit. We would call especial attention to the wonderful prayer of St. Paul in Ephesians 3:14. An analysis of this prayer will find no negative petition in it. No allusion to sin, actual or indwelling, occurs; but the eye of the Apostle sees only the positive blessing -- the fullness of God. This is utterly inconsistent with the existence of sin in the soul. Paul's logical mind would have seen the impropriety of such a prayer for sinners. For such he would have entreated God for pardon, and for cleansing by the washing of regeneration, and by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. But finding them thus cleansed, as empty vessels before the Lord, he prays that they may be filled with all the fullness of God.

This subject would not be complete without an examination of that fancied magna charta for the necessary existence of sin in the Christian heart prompting to sinful acts, namely, the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Does St. Paul here portray the Christian at his best earthly estate? Does he hold up his own moral photograph? To both of these queries we answer, No. St. Paul formed his style in the synagogue debates. "This explains the eminently dialogic character of the style. The ever-recurring second person, often the second person singular, shows us his co-disputant ever in his presence. By this the train of thought is varied and controlled into often unexpected and abrupt transitions. Objections, sometimes in the opponent's own words, sometimes put for him in St. Paul's words, are rapidly presented and rapidly overridden."

This being true, it requires great care to ascertain the character speaking -- whether the author is speaking for himself, or personating another. It is a very significant fact that for the first three centuries the entire Christian Church, with one accord, applied the picture of the vanquished and despairing slave described in Rom. 7:13~25, solely to the unregenerate man. "It seemed too low a picture for the possessor of a new Christian life, as the Apostle in the main current of thought is describing. Its application to the regenerate man was first invented by Augustine, who was followed by many eminent doctors of the Middle Ages. After the Reformation the interpretation of Augustine was largely adopted, especially by the followers of Calvin. At the present day the Church generally, Greek, Roman, Protestant, including some of the latest commentators, have returned to the just interpretation as held by the primitive Church." - Dr. Whedon. An examination of the preceding and succeeding passages will amply justify our conclusion that a regenerate soul never sat for this dark, sad portrait. This was never designed to depict the ideal Christian life, but is rather the portrayal of the struggles of a convicted sinner seeking justification by the works of the law. The ideal Christian life is found in the sixth chapter: "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life;" also in the eighth chapter: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." As the skillful painter puts a dark background when he or she wishes to make the central figure in the front more radiant, so St. Paul sets off the believer delivered from sin by holding up beside him the dark contrast of a convicted legalist vainly seeking justification by his good works. How sad the blunder of mistaking the profile of the sinner for the saint, and hanging it up for imitation by the body of believers.

We are confident in our conclusion that the Holy Scriptures nowhere apologize for sin, or in the least license it or extenuate its existence in the universe. To assert that the Holy God has made sin necessary under the reign of grace is to slander the Father, and pronounce the redemptive plan a stupendous failure.

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