**THE FUNDAMENTALS: A TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH**

**VOLUME 3; CHAPTER 2. PAUL'S TESTIMONY TO THE DOCTRINE OF SIN**

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Theodore Parker once said: "I seldom use the word sin. The Christian doctrine of sin is the devil's own. I hate it utterly". His view of sin shaped his views as to the person of Christ, atonement, and salvation. In fact, the sin question is back of one's theology, soteriology, sociology, evangelism, and ethics. One cannot hold a Scriptural view of God and the plan of salvation without having a Scriptural idea of sin. One cannot proclaim a true theory of society unless he sees the heinousness of sin and its relation to all social ills and disorders. No man can be a successful New Testament evangelist publishing the Gospel as "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth", unless he has an adequate conception of the enormity of sin. Nor can a man hold a consistent theory of ethics or live up to the highest standard of morality, unless he is gripped with a keen sense of sin's seductive nature.

**SIN A FACT IN HUMAN HISTORY**

Paul has an extensive vocabulary of terms denoting sin or sins. In the Epistle to the Romans, where he elaborates his doctrine of sin, he uses ten general terms for sin:

1. Hamartia; 58 times in all, 43 in Romans, missing of the mark, sin as a principle.

2. Hamarteema; twice, sin as an act.

3. Parabasis; five times, transgression, literally walking along by the line but not exactly according to it.

4. Paraptoma; 15 times, literally a falling, lapse, deviation from truth and uprightness (Thayer), translated "trespass" in R.V.

5. Adikia; 12 times, unrighteousness.

6. Asebeia; four times, ungodliness, lack of' reverence for God.

7. Anomia; lawlessness, six times.

8. Akatharsia; nine times, uncleanness, lack of purity.

9. Parakoee; twice, disobedience.

10. Planee; four times, wandering, error.

Besides these general terms for sin Paul uses many specific terms for various sins, 21 of these being found in the category of Rom. 1:29-31. Twenty-one equals three times seven and seems to express the idea of completeness in sin reached by the Gentiles. It is literally true that Paul uses scores of terms denoting and describing various personal sins, sensual, social, ethical, and religious. Is this not an unmistakable lexical evidence that the Apostle to the Gentiles believed in sin as a fact in human history?

Again, in all Paul's leading epistles he deals with sin in the abstract or with sins in the concrete. In Romans 1:183:20, he discusses the failure of both Jews and Gentiles to attain righteousness. These chapters constitute the most graphic and comprehensive description of sin found in Biblical, Greek, Roman, or any, literature. It is so true to the facts in heathen life today that modern heathen often accuse Christian missionaries of writing it after they have had personal knowledge of their life and conduct.

In 1 Corinthians, gross sins are dealt with - envy, strife, divisions, incest, litigation, adultery, fornication, drunkenness, covetousness, idolatry, etc. In 2 Corinthians, some of the same sins are condemned. In Galatians, he implies the failure of man to attain righteousness in maintaining the thesis that no man is justified by the deeds of the law, but any man may be justified by simple faith in Christ Jesus (2:14 ff), and mentions the works of the flesh, "fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry," etc. (5:19). In Ephesians, he recognizes that his readers were "once dead in trespasses and sins" (2:1), and exhorts them to lay aside certain sins (4:25 ff). In Colossians, he does the same. In Philippians, he says less about sin, or sins, but in 3:3-9 he tells his experience of failure to attain righteousness with all his advantages of birth, training, culture, and circumstances. In the pastoral epistles, he rebukes certain sins with no uncertain voice.

**PAUL'S EXPERIENCE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROOF TO HIM OF HIS DOCTRINE OF SIN**

Paul was a Pharisee. Righteousness, or right relation with God, was his religious goal. As a Pharisee he felt that he could and must, in himself, achieve righteousness by keeping the whole written and oral law. This kind of (supposable) righteousness he afterwards describes and repudiates. "For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh: though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. Howbeit, what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea, verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I suffered the loss of all things and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Phil. 3:3-9, Am.Rev.).

His experience as a Pharisee in trying to work out a righteousness of his own showed him to be a moral and religious failure. This experience he reflected in Rom. 7:7-25 (So Origen, Tertullian, Chrysostom, Theodoret, and most modern New Testament scholars, though Augustine and a few modern New Testament scholars think the passage refers to the experience of a Christian). "Sin, finding occasion through the commandment, beguiled me and through it slew me ... that through the commandment sin might become" (be shown to be) "exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I know not; for not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do ... Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord". So we see that Paul by his experience with the law was led to see that "in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelt no good thing;" that in his members is the sin principle enslaving him so that he "is sold under sin", that is, under the sway of this sin principle. He thought the law could help him to be righteous. All it could do was to show him his helplessness as a sinner and drive him in his despair to Christ as his only Rescuer "out of the body of this death". All the righteousness he could achieve was insufficient. Only God's own righteousness, given through faith in Christ Jesus, could satisfy the conscience of the awakened sinner or be acceptable to God.

**THE ORIGIN OF SIN**

The apostle does not discuss the larger problem, the origin of sin in God's moral universe. Whence and how did sin originally enter the moral universe? Paul does not undertake to solve this problem. Only the relative and temporal origin of sin, its entrance into the human race on earth, not its absolute and ultimate source, engages the thought of Paul.

But what is his testimony as to how and when sin entered the human race? The classic passage on the source of human sin is Rom. 5:12-21. Let us consider it. Paul testifies that sin entered our race in and through the disobedience of Adam. "As through one man sin [hamartia, the sin principle] entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned ... as through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation ... for as through the one man's disobedience many were made, sinners" (Rom. 5:12, 18, 19). In this parallelism between Adam and Christ, Paul is seeking to show, by contrast, the excellence of grace and the transcendent blessedness of the justified man in Christ. He is not primarily discussing the origin of human sin. But that does not depreciate his testimony. The fact that it is an incidental and not a studied testimony makes it all the more trustworthy and convincing.

Nor is Paul here simply voicing the thought of his uninspired fellow-countrymen as to the entrance of sin into our race. Dr. Edersheim says: "So far as their opinions can be gathered from their writings, the great doctrines of original sin and the sinfulness of our whole nature were not held by the ancient Rabbis".("Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," I. 165). Weber thus summarized the Jewish view as expressed in the Talmud: "By the Fall man came under a curse, is guilty of death, and his right relation to God is rendered difficult. More than this cannot be said. Sin, to which the bent and leaning had already been planted by creation, had become a fact, "the evil impulse" (cor malignum, 4 Es. 3:21) gained the mastery over mankind, who can only resist it by the greatest efforts; before the Fall it had power over him, but no such ascendency". (Altsyn. Theol., p. 216). The reader is referred to Wisd. 2:23 ff, Ecclus. 25:24 (33), 4 Es. 3:7, 21 ff, Apoc. Baruch 17:3, 54:15, 19, as expressions of the Jewish view of the entrance of sin into the world and the relation of Adam to the race in the transmission of guilt. One of these passages, Ecclus. 25:24 (33) the sin of the race is traced back to Eve: "from a woman was the beginning of sin".

**1.** Observe that Paul goes beyond the statement of any uninspired Jewish writers - In asserting that Adam and not Eve is the one through whom sin entered into the race.

**2.** That, in some sense, when Adam sinned, "all sinned", and in his sinning "all were made" (stood down or constituted) "sinners" (Rom. 5:19). The apostle here means, doubtless, that all the race was seminally in Adam as its progenitor, and that Adam by the process of heredity handed down to his descendants a depraved nature. He can scarcely mean that each individual was actually in person in Adam. If Adam had not sinned and thus depraved and corrupted the fountain head of the race, the race itself would not have been the heir of sin and the reaper of its fruits, sorrow, pain, and death.

**3.** That in the introduction of sin into the race by its progenitor the race itself was rendered helpless to extricate itself from sin and death. This the apostle asserts over and over again and has already demonstrated before he reaches the parallelism between Adam and Christ. "That every mouth may be stopped and all the world brought under the judgment of God"; "because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (3:19, 20).

**THE ESSENCE AND NATURE OF SIN**

This brings us to ask, What constituted the essence or core of sin, as Paul saw it? Modern evolutionists emphasize the upward tendency of all things, and so sin is regarded by them as merely a step in the upward progress of the race; that is, sin is "good in the making". Christian Scientists go still farther and regard all pain and evil as merely imaginary creations of abnormal minds.(See "Science and Health."). There is no actual evil, no real pain, say they. Does either of these views find endorsement in Paul? It must be noted that Paul nowhere gives a formal definition of sin. But by studying the terms mostly on his pen we can determine his idea of sin. He uses mostly the noun hamartia, 58 times, from the verb hamartano, to miss the mark, to sin. To miss what mark? In classical Greek it means "to miss an aim", "to err in judgment or opinion". With Paul to sin is to miss the mark ethically and religiously. Two other words used by Paul show us what the mark missed is: adikia, unrighteousness, lack of conformity to the will of God; anomia, lawlessness, failure to act or live according to the standard of God's law. So the mark missed is the Divine law. Parabasis), transgression, emphasizes the same idea, failure to measure up to the line of righteousness laid down in the law.

On the other hand, sin is not merely a negation. It is a positive quality. It is a ''fall" paraptoma, used 15 times). This is graphically illustrated by Paul in his description of the Gentile world's idolatry, sensuality, and immorality (Rom. 1:18-32). First, they knew God, for He taught them about Himself in nature and in conscience (1:19, 20). Secondly, they refused to worship Him as God, or to give thanks to Him as the Giver of all good things (1:21). Thirdly, they began to worship the creature rather than the Creator, then gave themselves up to idolatry in a descending scale, worshipping first human images, then those of birds, then those of beasts and reptiles (1:22-25). Fourthly, this wrong idea of God and false relation to Him degraded them into the grossest sensuality and blackest immorality (1:26-32). Is this progress of the race? If so, it is progress in the unfolding of sin's cumulative power, and that where human philosophy and culture were doing their utmost to stem the tide of vice and contribute to the advancement of human government, thought, art, and ethics - in the Roman Empire where flourished Hellenistic culture. But Paul was convinced from his own experience and his observation of society, illumined and led as he was by the Divine Spirit, that the sin principle in men was not an upward but a downward tendency, and that in spite of all the philosophies, and all culture and ethics, to train men in the upward way, intellectually, aesthetically, socially, and morally, still they were carried on down deeper and deeper in vice as they forgot God and followed out the trend of their own thoughts and desires. That is, if sin is a link in the chain of man's evolution, Paul would say it was a downward and not an upward step in the long road of man's development.

Let us look at another term used by Paul to express God's attitude toward sin. This is the term "wrath", occurring 20 times in Paul's epistles (This count follows Moulton and Geden, Concordance to the Greek Testament, and excludes Heb. from Paul's epistles,). Thayer defines this term thus: "That in God which stands opposed to man's disobedience, obduracy, and sin. and manifests itself in punishing the same." (Greek English Lexicon to New Testament). That is, sin is diametrically opposite to the element of holiness and righteousness in God's character, and so God's righteous character revolts at sin in man and manifests this revulsion by punishing sin. This manifestation of the Divine displeasure at sin is not spasmodic or arbitrary. It is the natural expression of a character that loves right and goodness. Because he does approve and love right and goodness, He must disapprove and hate unrighteousness and evil. The spontaneous expression of this attitude of God's character toward sin is "wrath". How heinous and enormous sin must be, if the loving and gracious God, in whom Paul believes, thus hates and punishes it! Its nature must be the opposite of those highest attributes of God, holiness, righteousness, love.

Take another term used by Paul, hupodikos, guilty (Rom. 3:19). Thayer thus defines this term: "Under judgment, one who has lost his suit; with a dative of person, debtor to one, owing satisfaction". (Ibid.) In this passage it is used with the dative of God and so "all the world" is declared by Paul to be "under judgment of God, having lost its suit with God, owing satisfaction to God" (and, it being implied, not able to render satisfaction to Him). This passage implies that the essence of sin is "guilt". Man by sin is "under judgment", "under sentence". He has come into court with God, is found to have broken God's law, and so is guilty and liable to punishment. ("Com. On Gal." in loco.). A secondary element in sin is implied in this term, the helplessness of man in sin, "owing satisfaction to God", but not able to render it.

It must be noted that Paul thinks of this guilt as having different degrees according to the light against which the sinner sins (Rom. 2:12-14). The Gentile sins without the law, that is, without knowing the requirements of the written law, and so he perishes without the law, that is, without the severity specially provided for the transgressor in the written law. But the Jew, who sins against the superior light of written revelation, shall receive the more severe penalty prescribed in the written law. All men are guilty of breaking God's law, but the different realms of law afford different degrees of light, and so the various transgressors are guilty in varying degrees, just as there are different degrees of murder and manslaughter, according to the circumstances and motives of those guilty.

Paul uses the term sin to express three phases of sin: First, the sin principle, or sin in the abstract. He uses the term more often in this sense than in any other. He often personifies the sin principle, doubtless because he believes in the personal Satan. Secondly, by implication he teaches that man is in a state of sin. (Rom. 5:18, 19.) "All men unto condemnation" means that men are in a state of condemnation - guilty of breaking God's law, and therefore worthy of punishment. "Made sinners" signifies that man's nature is essentially sinful, and so man may be said to be under the sin principle, or in the state of sin (though this phrase, "in the state of sin," does not occur in Paul, but first in theologians of a later age). Thirdly, Paul uses several terms for sin which signify acts of sin. Here he views it in the concrete. Men forget God, hate God, lie, steal, kill, commit adultery, hate parents, love self, etc., etc. In this sense he sees the stream of human conduct which is only the expression of the sin principle.

**RELATION OF THE LAW TO SIN**

Does the law produce sin? Is the law sinful in that it causes men to sin? Not at all, asserts Paul. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet; but sin, finding occasion, wrought in me through the commandment all manner of coveting; for apart from the law sin is dead", etc., etc. (Rom. 7:7-14, R.V.) The following points seem clearly expressed in this passage:

**1.** The law is not the real cause of man's sin. Not even its severest demands can be charged with causing man's sin.

**2.** This is true, because the law is essentially "holy, righteous, good"; holy in the double sense of being a separate order of being and conduct ordained by God and also requiring holiness, or the following of this separate order of being and conduct; righteous in the sense of being the expression of God's will and the standard of man's thoughts and actions; good in the sense that it is ordained for benevolent ends. It is also called "spiritual" in the sense that it was given through God's Spirit and conduces to spirituality if obeyed from the right motive.

**3.** But this holy and righteous, good and spiritual, law became "the occasion" of sinning. This Paul illustrates with the tenth commandment. He would not have coveted if the law had not said, Thou shalt not covet. The Greek word for "occasion" means literally "a base of operations" (Thayer). The sin principle makes the command of God its headquarters for a life-long campaign of struggle in man, urging him to evil actions and deterring him from good ones. There is something in man which revolts from doing the thing demanded and inclines him to do the thing forbidden. Hence, the sin principle, using this tendency in man, and so making the law the base of its operations, becomes the "occasion" to sinning.

**4.** The law shows the sinfulness of sin - shows it to be heinous in its nature and deadly in its consequences. This is what Paul intimated in Rom. 5:20, when he said, "the law came in besides that the trespass might abound". The law shows men that they are failures in the matter of achieving righteousness.

**5.** The law thus negatively prepares the way for leading men to Christ as their only Rescuer. "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:24, 25). The apostle was driven to despair as he plunged headlong into persecution and its enormous sins, but when he reached the end of his own strength he looked up and accepted deliverance from the risen Christ.

**RELATION OF THE FLESH TO SIN**

Paul often uses the term "flesh" in contrast with the term spirit. In this sense flesh, according to Thayer, means "mere human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from Divine influence, and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God". He regards the flesh (occurring 84 times) as the seat of the sin principle. "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18). He does not mean to deny that sin as a guilty act rests on the human will. He always takes for granted human freedom to choose. Yet he regards the lower nature of man (his sarx) as the element of weakness and corruption in man, which furnishes a field for the operation of the sin principle. The law is the "base of operations" (occasion), but the flesh is the open field where the sin principle operates. This sin principle drags the higher man (called "the inner man", Rom. 7:22, "the mind, or reason," 7:25, or more usually, the spirit) down into the realm of the flesh and through the passions, appetites, etc. (Gal. 5:16, Eph. 2:3), leads the whole man into thoughts, acts, and courses of sin.

But we must hasten to say that Paul docs not adopt the Platonic view that matter is evil per se. Paul does not think of man's physical structure as being in itself sinful and his spirit, or soul, in itself as holy. He merely emphasizes the serfdom of man under the sway of the sin principle on account of the weakness of human flesh. Nor does Paul claim that human reason is free from sin because it approves the law of God. His expression (Rom. 7:25) "I of myself with the mind [reason] indeed serve [am slave to] the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin", only emphasizes the fact of struggle in man; that the higher nature does approve the requirements of God's law, though it cannot meet those demands because of the slavery of his lower nature (flesh) to the sin principle.

**THE CONSEQUENCES. OF SIN**

This point needs no prolonged discussion. Paul thinks of death, with its train of antecedents, sorrow, pain and all kinds of suffering, as the consequence of sin. This means physical as well as spiritual death, and the latter (separation of man from fellowship with God) is of prime import to Paul. We need not bring Paul into conflict with the claims of modern natural scientists, that man would have suffered physical death had Adam never sinned. The only man that scientists know is the mortal man descended from Adam who sinned. Therefore they cannot logically assert that man would have died had Adam not sinned. Nor need we say that Paul's cosmic view of sin, namely, that the entrance of the sin principle into human life by Adam vitiated the whole cosmos, that because of sin "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now" (Rom. 7:22), is unscientific. He here merely asserted the great fact that all cosmic life, plant, animal, and human, has been made to suffer because of the presence of sin in man. Who can doubt it? See Rom. 5:12-14, 21; 6:21; 7:10; 8:19-25; Eph. 2:1, etc.

**THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN**

Paul regards every man as a guilty sinner, however great may be his natural or cultural advantages. He felt that he had the greatest advantages "in the flesh" to attain righteousness (Phil. 3:3-9), but he had miserably failed (Rom. 7:24). Therefore all men have failed (Rom. 1:18-2:29). But he is not satisfied with a mere experiential demonstration of the universality of sin. He likewise bases it on the dictum of Scripture (Rom. 3:9-20). More than that he studied the facts of human life, both Jewish and Gentile, and so by the inductive method is led by the Spirit to declare "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:20); "All have sinned and are coming short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

**THE PERSISTENCE OF THE SIN PRINCIPLE**

In Gal. 5:17, 18, Paul tells the Galatian Christians that "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other, that ye may not do the things that ye would". Lightfoot says: "It is an appeal to their own consciousness: Have you not evidence of these two opposing principles in your own hearts?" ("Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah" I. 165). The Galatian Christians are exhorted to "walk in the Spirit" and let not the sin principle, which is not utterly vanquished in the flesh at regeneration, prevail and cover them in defeat and shame. This same persistence of the sin principle is described in Rom. 8:5-9, where he surely is describing the experience of believers. Then in Phil. 3:12-14, he alludes to his own Christian experience thus: "I count not that I have already obtained; or am already made perfect; but I press on if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold. ... I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus". Paul knew by experience that the old sin principle still pursued him and that on account of the weakness of the flesh he had not reached the "goal" of practical righteousness. Even in his old age (1 Tim. 1:15) he breaks forth in the consciousness of his own enormous inherent sinfulness: "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief". Every Greek scholar knows that in the last clause, "I am", both pronoun and verb being expressed and their order inverted, is emphatic. Sin pursued the great and consecrated apostle even down to gray hairs. Sin is a Napoleon conducting his disturbing, destructive, and death bringing campaigns even in the Christian's life. We may, by the grace of God and the help of the Spirit, make him prisoner on Elba, but he will escape and continue till life's latest breath to distract our minds and defeat our holiest ambitions. But this Napoleon in the realm of our religious experience, like the Napoleon in the experience of European kings and nations, shall meet his Waterloo.

**SIN FINALLY VANQUISHED IN CHRIST JESUS**

Paul has this thought of conquest in mind in that unique passage, Rom. 5:12-21. The conquest of sin by grace in Christ Jesus far transcends the demolishing power of sin handed down by Adam to his posterity. "But where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly, that as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord". This is the apostle's paean of triumph as he draws the last pen stroke in describing the blessedness of the justified man.

The first historic conquest of sin in Christ was His conception without sin; though born of a sinful woman, her sinful nature was not handed down to Him. Then followed victory after victory - in those thirty silent years in which He never yielded to a single sinful impulse; in the wilderness struggle when in that supreme moment He said, Get thee hence, Satan; on Calvary when He meekly submitted to the sufferings of human sin, in which submission He showed Himself above sin; in the resurrection when death was defeated and driven from his own battle field, the grave, while He as the Son of God arose in triumph and in forty days afterward sat down on the right hand of the Father, to send to men the Spirit to apply and enforce His mediatorial work.

Then this conquest of sin is personalised in each believer. At regeneration the sin principle is subdued by the Spirit in Christ and the Divine nature so implanted, as to guarantee the complete conquest of sin. In the life of consecration and service the sin principle goes down in defeat step by step, until in death whose sting is sin, the believer triumphs in Christ on the last field; he feels no sting and knows the strife with the sin monster is forever passed, and in exultation he receives "an abundant entrance" to the kingdom of glory, as Paul triumphantly received it. (Phil. 1:21, 23; 2 Tim. 4:6-8.)