



The New Shofar

In Christ all enmity breaks down and we truly become One

January 23rd

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

This quotation from John has its power only when we are able to affirm how we are people of sin. Twice this week I have had excellent discussions about the nature of sin—what is it? Are we always in a state of sin, even after the death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection from the grave? Let us begin with an understanding of the word “sin”.

1 John 1:8 The Greek word used for sin is a word found in archery. It means—to miss the mark. Outside of archery it has a wider range of possible translations—to turn aside, to wander, to err, to make a mistake. Thus, the sin is not to be found in a particular action...I stole some money. The sin is the failure to love, serve, worship and obey God. We are all called to *be holy for I am holy* and yet throughout life this is a goal towards which we are always on pilgrimage. Fortunately, on this pilgrimage, we know that God is with us, showering us with graces and comforting, supporting, forgiving us along the way. Thank you God for the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus the Christ! Thank you that we are defined by your graces and not our sins.



The Good News is not all about sin

This is what St Paul stresses in **Romans 5:20**...*where sin abounded, grace did abound more*

Within each of us exists the image of God, however disfigured and corrupted by sin it may presently be. God is able to recover this image through grace as we are conformed to Christ.

exceedingly. God pours out his abundant graces on us according to our needs (whether we acknowledge our need or deny it). God knows how we will miss the mark (i.e. sin) but that does not stop Him loving us. How can I be sure of that? Turning again to St Paul we know that God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Saint or sinner, we remain children of God; sons and daughters created in God's own image and likeness. That cannot be undone.

Grace is not simply leniency when we have sinned. Grace is the enabling gift of God not to sin.

The Hebrew Bible has six nouns and three verbs used to define sin. The most common one has the sense of something evil, something that goes against the nature of God. Others range meaning...*something deserving of punishment; being perverse, crooked, twisted; rebellion; trespass; to vacillate, to stray, deceive, seduce, to stagger...*

Our conclusion? Sin is a lot more complicated than our English language would suggest. In both testaments, though, the key thing to keep in mind is God and the divine will for us. To go our own way before heeding the divine expectations is to sin. We head off in a way of our own making. However we want to define sin, the central point is how it impacts on our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters. We are either drawing nearer to God and growing in our intimacy with Him, or we are becoming stagnant, cold or distancing ourselves from the God who seeks after us. Forget about counting and listing individual “sins” and begin to prayerfully ponder the way we live in God, for God and with God.

Above all else, God is a God of grace

When God reveals the divine nature to Moses, God's voice proclaims, *Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6)*. The passage does go on to name God's judgment against the guilty, a sentiment no less consistent in the New Testament than in the Jewish Scriptures. However, the biblical God, whether "Old" or "New" Testament, is, above all else a God of grace.



We know from the New Testament that Jesus himself acknowledges the distinction between righteous people and sinners. He declared how he had come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. Sinners are not lost to God. They are the opposite. They are specifically targeted by God, they are the reason God sent His only Son to become one with us. His parable of the lost sheep reemphasizes the distinction between sinners who repent and those who do not need repentance.

Why does it help to speak of ourselves as being “sinners”? Because God pursues the sinner. They have a special place in the divine plan. Jesus' opponents routinely criticized Jesus for cavorting with "tax collectors and sinners" In turn, Jesus' followers celebrated this reputation. They remembered that such people freely chose to follow Jesus. They recalled how Jesus envisioned the tax collectors and prostitutes preceding the righteous in God's new reign .



The biblical teaching about sin is not building shame and guilt in us. When it speaks of sin the point is that we are now targeted by God as He seeks us. The further we run, the greater the efforts of God to bring us home (He sent His Son for this task). And so, when we are feeling lost, or abandoned; uncertain or forgotten; when worries seem to hold us back, we should fear not. The Good Shepherd is already looking for us. He will find us, will lift us on his shoulders and will carry us home.