

After the Deception

A pungent odor of pipe tobacco filled the dark room. As I sank into the overstuffed chair in front of the large wood desk, the place seemed dark, ...yeah, dark is the word. But, it wasn't just that the lights were dimmed.

The campus reverend behind the desk looked at me, a 19 year old just-wonderfully-saved kid and asked again what exactly I wanted. "I just gave my heart to the Lord last night and I'd like to follow Him. What do I do?" I responded.

His answer gave me the shivers, "Well, if you really want to know Him, you'll first have to know the devil."

I immediately excused myself and promptly made my exit.

Clearly, this man's advice was at best misdirected. However, knowing about the enemy's devices is indeed an important part of our warfare.

Sin is the topic of this short article, specifically the 'pathology' of sin. It is my intent to briefly put a heavenly spotlight on it in order to remind us of sin's origin, its method of infection, its effects and consequences, and its conclusion. In doing so, it's my hope that we will glean additional Biblical understanding of it (versus any other kind), and that armed with this understanding, we will love, worship, pray and minister all the more effectively until the Lord's return.

Sin loves dark places. It hides in dark places and proliferates in the dark. Conversely, it simply cannot abide in the Light. Interestingly enough, it seems to have found its origin in Lucifer, which means "light bearer" for it transformed him such that his name became Satan, the devil, the destroyer, etc. (See Eze

28:12-15) Though he can yet appear as an angel of light, that's only a deception.

From here, it appears that he 'infected' some of the angelic host – perhaps a third of them (See Rev 12:4). And certainly, we know that he infected mankind. (See Genesis 3) I use the term 'infected' specifically, for sin is very much like a disease. It's spiritual in nature, but it's sickening consequences are very observable even in the material world.

Now, mankind is universally infected from conception. (See Rom 3:23 and 5:12) Nevertheless, sin displays degrees of magnitude within the individual and within a society. It is clearly constrained in this world by the Spirit of God, (2Thes2:7) but this is the topic of another discussion. Suffice it to say that the scriptures speak of trespasses, sins, great sin, besetting sins, iniquity and blasphemy of the Holy Spirit – the latter being the only one that is not forgiven in Christ for it is the rejection of Christ.

But herein is a very important point – sin always seems to start off small. This is a fundamental part of its deceptive maturation process.

Consider the Garden of Eden. Satan did not tempt Eve to murder, divorce or even hurt Adam. The lure was to do something seemingly 'small' in the way of disobedience to God; something that we can't be sure she even got first hand from the Lord since she wasn't around when the warning was given to Adam.

But the bombshell was that what looked like a small deal was actually a multi-megaton warhead – the first Weapon of Mass Destruction. The WMD was to doubt God. To doubt

His Word, His motive, His goodness, His love and thus to believe Satan instead. You see, doubt is not the absence of belief but rather the believing of something else in its place. Mankind didn't just disobey, he switched masters.

And it is still true today. Sin crouches at the doorway of our hearts, (see Gen 4:7); it inhabits our flesh, and in stealth, in deception, it tries to lure us into its deadly jaws.

It appeals to three things – the lust of our eyes, the desire of our flesh and/or our stinking pride. It is so incredibly effective because as it is destroying, it blinds us to its true nature. Eve did not realize her own deception until after giving the fruit that "was good for food", "pleasant to the eyes", and "desirable to make one wise" to Adam. I used to tell the youth in our church that sin wants you to see it as an ice cream sundae and to taunt you for your 'diet'. All the while, it is really a steaming, stinking 'meadow muffin'.

Now, if it cannot lure us directly into its 'trap', it is satisfied initially in drawing us to the 'edge', to the brink of the cliff so to speak. Insidiously, it knows that as long as we hang out 'near the tree', near the place of sin (in our minds or otherwise), that we will indeed be swept over the brink by the next 'wind' that blows.

Pathologically, the effect of sin is basically to harden, to desensitize and to disintegrate us. The Bible likens sin to two types or word-pictures – leprosy and leaven.

Leprosy is a disease that infects the nervous system and breaks it down. A leper loses feeling in the extremities.

Leaven is yeast, a material that rots or corrodes its host. And such is sin;

it hardens (Heb 3:13, Mat 19:8, Job 41:24, Eze 3:7, 2Chron 36:13) and it creates a callousness over our hearts. Meanwhile, it rots and grows by festering. One sin leads to another to another to another... and you know along with me that it's never satisfied. Like yeast, it breaks down the integrity of its host. It breaks down the mental, moral, physical processes and brings its subject to disintegration and death (Pro 14:30, Isa 5:24). It's a horrific sight.

Now, I would love to be able to tell you that after you give your heart to Christ, this is no longer a problem, but we can all testify that just ain't so. In fact, in some ways, it's even more of an issue.

Upon accepting Christ as Savior and Lord, you were inhabited by His Holy Spirit and your sins – all your sins, big, little, past, present and even future were forgiven by God. It is also true that this forgiveness is complete – that is, God doesn't just put your sins on a shelf so to speak where He can refer to them the next time you blow it, but He utterly obliterates them from His memory and separates them from you by an infinite distance (as far as east is from west).

Nevertheless, that doesn't mean you will not be tempted by sin or experience the consequences of sin in this life. Paul gave perhaps the most outstanding treatise on this in the book of Romans chapters 5 – 8. When you're saved, you begin to change but sin does not. It still wants to destroy you. Fortunately, as a saved person, you have additional help – although the devil will try to convince you otherwise, you've actually been set free from

the domination of sin in your life. When you are born anew, you have the ability to chose not to sin.

Salvation results in the right kind of 'pro-choice' movement if you would.

However, you still occasionally sin don't you. (Yes, you do, don't deny it.) And what do you do about it?

This is where the saved person can even face more travail for unlike the lost and unrepentant, he/she cares about sin and increasingly recognizes sin for what it is. As Paul wrote, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24)

But when you fail, if you'll listen to the Spirit of God and repent, the result can actually be healthy for it leads to greater and greater humility in your character as well as appreciation of holiness. The spiritually healthy Christian is much more concerned about personally pleasing God than in pointing out others' shortfalls. This isn't self-centeredness, it's God-centeredness.

But unless you know how to deal with it, you can end up either tolerating sin or being condemned for it. The Bible clearly states that "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1Jn2:1) And, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1Jn1:9) and "there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ." (Rom 8:1). That is, we are to confess, repent and get moving in the right direction. We are also to 'rescue' our brethren in humility and love when we observe them having problems knowing that we are also vulnerable in the flesh. (See Gal 6:1,2)

Toleration of sin happens frequently when we listen to the thought that says, 'oh, it's not that bad' or when we use the wrong measuring stick – i.e. we compare ourselves to others. Now, I'm not trying to set a standard for you here, but as an illustration, I've had good friends tell me that they watch R-rated movies because "they're just a little violent" or because they know their pastor saw them. I know sincere Christians who've let sin absolutely ruin their marriage, their ministry and their memories, pastors that have deserted their families and ministries, missionaries that have returned self-righteous or bitter and angry from their mission field, the list goes on and on...all because they tolerated sin.

God hates sin with a perfect hatred and we should also (Psa 97:10, Pro 8:13). He will never tolerate it because it's destroying His loved ones, and it cost Him the life of His only begotten Son.

You may think I'm being simplistic but I'm passionate about the ignorance of sin. None of us who believe have the 'luxury' (in these last days) of time to toy with sin, to ignore it or to walk under its cloud. And trust me, I say that 'in the mirror' much more than sharing it herein.

Certainly, none of us will 'attain' to some sinless state in this life. But as 'we see the day approaching', let's all fight the good fight day by day until our dear Lord's return.

Sin -- never become comfortable with it or condemned by it. Let's always keep the awesomeness of our Heavenly Father and our Perfect Savior in mind. For when we see Him, we shall be like Him. Hallelujah!