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SIN

“We believe that men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam’s transgression”
(from the “Epitome of Faith”).

THE ORIGINAL SIN

The Word of God indicates that all men are created in a state of innocence at birth. The fact that God created man and pronounced that creation good does not indicate the immediate perfection of man. The Creator could not have been true to Himself and man if the finished product had been realized in the act of spiritual and physical creation. Perfection was to be realized through the process of conditioning by will or choice. No one could do for man what he himself must do for himself. Herein is the essence of his agency.

The gift of intelligence is the essence of our being. An ingenious arrangement of spirit made it possible for man to reach out and comprehend truth. All truth, as also all intelligence, has been placed within the area of man’s intellect. This is fundamental to the exercise of agency. It was not until man was placed in the garden of Eden that his agency was given (see Genesis 7:40). Choice depends upon the existence of two or more objects or ideas. When this condition exists, judgment can be exercised. Such was the symbolism in the garden situation.

In spite of the command of God, Adam and Eve decided to eat the forbidden fruit. They desired the thing which seemed to be most immediate and needful to them. As a result of this transgression, sin entered into their natures. At the same time, intelligence began to exist among men, and truth began to be comprehended. The existence of one demanded the existence of the other. In the act of choosing, man set himself upon the road to either become a son of God or a son of perdition. The choice was his and only his. The degree of his right or wrong choices—and acting upon these choices—determined his destiny. Even though God forgave Adam his sin in the garden, he was destined to experience the result of his sinning. That result was death. Since the days of our first parents, we have inherited the potential to choose either life or death. The struggle is ever with us between good and evil. We are constantly faced with the problem of agency. We cannot escape it.

Adam and Eve were as innocent as children prior to the first transgression. They were growing up in their understanding of life. Their knowledge was in a very immature and undeveloped state. If they had remained and eaten together of the tree of life, they would have been immature in their eternal existence; and the plan of God for them toward perfection would have been stopped. They would have had eternal immaturity with eternal existence. This was not to be.

It seems reasonable, in the plan of justice, that each man projected into the world must experience this cycle of life as did our first parents—birth in innocence, exercise of judgment and choice, determination of his own destiny through the struggle of agency and the revelation of Jesus Christ, which gives meaning to existence. The fact that man was driven from the garden indicates that in his sinful condition the process of procreation was to persist. In this sense children are conceived in sin. When they begin to arrive at the condition of accountability, sin conceives in their hearts due to the insidious and subtle temptations of Satan to transgress the laws of God.

Agency can work only in a state of relative freedom. Man needs time to think, evaluate, and act. His life span on earth is necessary for the expression of these functions. Within the framework of this freedom to act for himself lies the fundamental need for revelation and redemption from God. Even though man is endowed with agency and free will, it is God Who established the conditions of his redemption. It was, and is, in this atmosphere of opposites that succeeding generations were and are born. History is the testimony of how well man has responded in either direction.

REDEMPTION FROM SIN

Redemption from sin rests primarily with God. Man cannot nor does he possess the power to redeem himself. He possesses the ability, through choice, to redeem himself as those choices are directed and related to the redemptive plan of God through Christ. An infinite atonement had to be made for man. The vicarious sacrifice made for man through Jesus Christ was in the original plan. Inasmuch as Christ was involved in man's creation, He must also be involved in his salvation.

Against the background of the purpose of God—that of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man—we must necessarily understand the relationship of man's experience in the use of agency. We understand his temptations and sins, his redemption through Christ by repentance, and baptism by water for the remission of sins. We see his worthiness, because of obedience to laws and ordinances, to receive the Holy Spirit in order to continue the transformation of his fallen nature into that of a son of God.

THE NATURE OF SIN

Once a man has sinned, there is established a sympathetic tendency to commit sin again. The act of sinning writes itself into the nature of man. Repentance cannot erase the effect immediately; the memory and effect are still there. For this reason, death is the only answer. It is the only way of release. In this light, death is a blessing. The tragedy lies in the fact that sin remains a quality of spirit and is taken with man into death. He cannot rid himself of this, even in death. The body disintegrates and goes back to its original sphere. The spirit of man retains its quality, and its nature is changed through repentance. There is no escape from self. Sin corrupts our natures. It conditions the will and heart to hardness and ultimately to rebellion against God. This is the most serious manifestation of sin in man. Interminable absence from the presence of God and Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit is the worst effect of sin.

FORGIVENESS OF SIN

Sin is both individual and social. The responsibility for sin rests with Satan and is shared by those who obey and follow him. We also share in the effects of sin to the degree of our sinning. However, there is the principle of the forgiveness of sins. This is revealed in the outreach of love as it flows from God through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Men must develop a forgiving nature. Jesus taught, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matthew 6:13). The delicate balance between forgivability and forgiveness spells the difference between fellowship with God and Christ and fellow man or fellowship with darkness.

Men cannot carry forever the effects of their sinning. Those who do deny themselves the priceless possession of peace of mind. Those who are at peace within are those who have been forgiven. The conditions for forgiveness lie within man. Those conditions are written in his very nature. The opportunity for forgiveness lies before all. The fact of forgiveness lies with those who have accepted the challenge to become sons of God.

It is God who declares the conditions for forgiveness. It is obedience to those conditions that frees man from his sin. As man understands the relationship of repentance and forgiveness to his growth and development toward fellowship with his God, he begins to appreciate the full value of his being.

The Kingdom of God is the ultimate goal of man's existence and achievement. The degree of his cooperative effort to establish righteousness in every field of legitimate human relationships marks the degree of his forgiveness. Inasmuch as repentance is the basis for forgiveness, repentance finds its expression in the building up of right social relationships between man and his fellow man. These relationships are identified in institutions within the Zion community. Men are not really forgiven until they manifest their relationship to God through the Zion plans. They find there an ever growing, unfolding revelation of God's Spirit within the community of man.

Baptism for the remission of sins is not fully realized in the act itself. There are personal sins which might be forgiven in the experience of the performance of the ordinance. There are many sins which are forgiven only through accepting the principle of baptism as a way of life. Baptism, in this light, becomes the beginning of the fulfillment of forgiveness and not the culmination of forgiveness.

Remission of sins is achieved at the end of building the Zion community. For this reason, sin persists in the Church in proportion to the distance between what we are and what we are to be. Baptism commits us to the promise of forgiveness and remission of sins, but the achievement of the Kingdom is the guarantee of complete remission of sins. The achievement of the abundant life is realized only through struggle and eternal vigilance.

Singleness of purpose under God is the eternal principle underlying the Zion life. In this upward way, many areas of immaturity reveal themselves. Each error, made in an honest effort under God to establish the Kingdom, will be forgiven immediately if we correct the error.

A responsibility rests upon the people regarding forgiveness of sins. Sometimes sins are magnified out of proportion to their true setting and situation. When enlarged upon through gossip and when the facts are not known, almost invariably there is established an impossible barrier for the sinner to reestablish himself in the company of his fellows. Forgiveness must transcend the sinner's repentance. If it does not, we are jeopardizing the man's salvation. When we hinder the function of forgiveness, we are placing ourselves in a delicate and precarious position. "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive; but of you it is required to forgive all men" (D&C 64:2e).

JUDGE NOT UNRIGHTEOUSLY

"Judge not unrighteously, that ye be not judged; but judge righteous judgment. For with what judgment ye shall judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2-3).

We can be sure of the fact that final judgment rests with God. He shall have the final word in evaluating any and all conditions resident in man. He made man and seeks to perfect man. He judges man. It is by His grace that we are saved. The measure of our salvation is in our acceptance of His grace. His love for man is unmeasured. It is in this principle of love for man that mercy and justice are the moving factors in the final judgment. When we partake of His nature, we are motivated in our judgments by the same spirit which motivates Him. Joy, responsibility, and pleasure become ours when our life has His nature and the infusion of His Spirit.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is sin?
2. Evaluate this statement, "A man can constantly think sinful thoughts and yet remain pure."
3. What was the nature of original sin? Can we still commit the original sin?
4. Where does the responsibility for sin lie? Are things sinful if they affect only ourselves and not others?
5. Can anything we do that involves a wrong choice affect only us?
6. What are three things sin does to us?
7. Why should we be concerned about the balance between forgiveness and the ability to forgive?
8. Why should men not judge one another?
9. Why is agency such an essential part of man's growth toward perfection?