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Mini Study

BUT...IS IT SIN?

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

"Sin" isn't a word much used in popular speech today. Mention it and eyebrows are raised. "Are you living in the dark ages?" is a likely response. In the modern world our actions are "relative." If it seems good to you then do it - you are not "guilty." It isn't the "Christian way," though that doesn't bother most folk since Christianity itself is considered "old hat," redundant, and obsolete; how, then, do we define "sin?"

- The fact that society is big on law-making indicates there is some standard, however vague, about "right and wrong," about what is lawless. At times in the past there was a recognized consensus in the Western world based on Christian values. Governments today, however, impose their own perverse values on society. Yet no sane person would argue that murder, infidelity, or theft are acceptable.
- ...any practice that overrules the ancient foundational laws that regulate society (the Biblical Commandments, and judgments based on them) are "perverse." Mankind functions best when they are obeyed.
- Christian morality is firmly rooted in the Christian Bible. *Lawlessness* (Gk *anomia*) is one definition of sin found in the Scriptures (I John 3:4). Not man's self-defined law, but God's. More broadly it is defined as "...come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). That includes all of us. That's some standard!
- We each make a personal judgment as to what we consider is "okay" or what we can't in all conscience do. It is formed in us by our nurture (how our parents' and other educators' values are instilled in us), by reflection as we grow, and by experience. The Christian conscience is, must be, shaped by the teachings of the Bible.
- Yet, even among Christians, there is disagreement as to what is "lawlessness"- sin. Arguments abound concerning which day is the Sabbath, which holidays are commanded, divorce and remarriage, medical intervention, and even controversies over sexual orientation and abortion.
- The Scriptures outline a specific "form of religion." It was revealed by the Creator from the beginning and only ignorance or the blinkers of tradition or wilful disobedience to God's revelation can obscure the way God desires to be worshipped. These revealed "holy days" (Leviticus 23) are the framework for the true faith and have remained unchanged since the beginning - though their significance is understood only in the light shed by the life of Jesus Christ. (Jeremiah 29:13).
- But that's not by any means all there is to sin. We may perfectly obey God in the externals - days on which we worship, the food we eat, the place of worship we attend. We may turn from a life of criminal activity. We may abandon an unlawful sexual relationship. All these are indeed part of the package called Christianity. Yet

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there's more.

- Jesus challenged the Jews to make radical change. He called on them to see in Himself the fulfilment of their age-long religious practice - their rituals, their festivals, their sacrifices, their hope of a Deliverer, a Messiah. It is only through *His* sacrifice that their sin is forgiven. Change (repentance) was required - inner change through the indwelling Spirit of God. No matter how well they observed the externals, (and they, too, are part of the "salvation package") what is key is a transformation of the inner man, of our character, our "heart."
- Paul was concerned about this: "*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...*" (Romans 12:2). In his letters, he pinpoints the changes worked in us through God's Spirit. He lists the "*fruit of the Spirit*" (Galatians 5:22-23) - the divine characteristics implanted in us as we co-operate with the Spirit's prompting through our searching of God's Word.
- When after mature reflection, we fully commit ourselves to Jesus Christ and are baptized, we receive God's Spirit. That is, the divine character is implanted in us. The Law of God is internalized and the process of transformation begins (some call it *sanctification*).
- Jesus shows the meaning of that transformation in the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew chapters 5-7). Not just murder, for example, but the anger, the hateful thoughts, that lead to it. Not just the act of adultery but the lustful thoughts that wreck a marriage and lead to infidelity. Sin is *not only* in the act - but is of the heart. It is there in "*the hidden man of the heart*" (I Peter 3:4), our innermost invisible thoughts, that sin dwells. Jesus said: "*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are [the things] which defile a man...*" (Matthew 15:19-20). Paul amplifies the list: "*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are [these]; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of which I tell you before, as I have also told [you] in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*" (Galatians 5:19-21).

(All Scripture references are KJV unless otherwise noted.)

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