

The Roots of Corruption

Call it what you will—sin, evil, badness - it is acknowledged as everywhere present, and underlying every human challenge. It manifests in every social and physical ill and affects all of us from conception to death. How did ‘sin’ enter humanity?

Without the concept of a divine Being, a Creator, we struggle to account for evil. In Scripture ‘sin’ means ‘to miss the mark’ and without a supreme God there is no ‘mark’ other than what *we* decide is ‘evil’. Hence the widespread confusion between *right* and *wrong*.

From the divine view, the prophet Isaiah had this to say of the contemporary leadership: ‘...*You call evil good and call good evil. You turn darkness into light and light into darkness*’ (ch 5:20).

Unless, in other words, there is a known and universally recognized ‘mark’ we simply make our own. Governments, for example, overturn long-standing traditional practices using their own marks often pushed through on personal prejudice by powerful individuals or institutions. Too often their *mark* is contrary to the divine—and has adverse unforeseen consequences. (We could cite, for starters, *abortion*, or *family relations*, or *soft justice*, or *multiculturalism*.) Individually we set our own personal standards.

Divine Mark

In creating mankind God made us to function optimally in accord with built-in principles. Our *physical*

state is governed by myriad essential chemical interactions – still largely a mystery to science. Our *social* state is governed by family law. Our *psychological* state is governed by principles laid out in Scripture and now slowly being unraveled by psychologists.

Direct from the creative hand of God, mankind was ‘perfect’, a logical and rational being with the capacity to positively dominate all earth’s bounty, to ‘...*dress and keep*’ it. He had unending life in the flesh in a perfect environment. He had the mental capacity to unravel the secrets of the universe. He reflected God’s creativity. He was gifted with language. He walked and talked and was instructed by the Creator in those in-built principles. And he perfectly understood that all this depended on his continuing companionship with and submission to his Creator.

Our Choice

Isaiah tell us the reason for our present plight: ‘...*the earth is polluted because its people disobeyed the laws of God, breaking their agreement [covenant] that was to last forever. The earth is under a curse; its people are dying out because of their sins*’ (ch 24:5). Our forerunner, that is, entered a binding covenant with the Creator to maintain these principles in return for being lord of the planet—the role coveted by Lucifer.

Perfect Adam may have been, but he was in no way an automaton. To maintain his commitment to that covenant he had to make choices, to choose his own desires (he had ‘human nature’, though at that time unsullied by sin)—or to

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choose to live by the terms of the covenant made with our Creator.

Adam's choice

There's no record as to how long he lived in harmony with the covenant. He had to name the inferior creatures perhaps spending time observing their habits to name them appropriately. Nor do we know how long he spent bonding with Eve and tending to Eden. Perhaps he was often tempted by that special tree—after all, it was forbidden!

Then he, knowing the consequences, chose to accept his wife's invitation to eat its fruit. He was not deceived (by Lucifer), as was Eve (I Timothy 2:14) - it was his deliberate choice. And the dire consequences began to set in that day—death, earth's bounty withheld, distorted family relationship, loss of his sovereignty over Earth. Above all, no direct access to the Creator, except through an intermediary and the shedding of the blood of an innocent.

Radical Change

Contrary to previous opinion, it is now understood that our actions during our life-span can materially affect our genes. Adam's internal and external environment was overturned through his catastrophic breaking of the covenant. He from that moment began to die. His relationship with Eve became confused. His thought processes no longer reflected the mind of God—perhaps leading to failed environmental practices. And the Adversary assumed the role of '*the god of this world*'.

We are his heirs. As God said: '*...I bring punishment on those who hate me [don't heed my laws] and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation. But I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws*' (Exodus 20:5-6).

That is, our behaviour, whether law-abiding or lawless, carries automatic rewards and penalties—the latter described here as God's 'punishment'. The adverse inherited effects vary from person to person.

Since Adam every human being has, ultimately, inherited death, for all have sinned in him as the fountain-head of the human race. We inherited *physical* death because of genetic mutations, and *spiritual* death

'...as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned'
(Romans 5:12)

Festivals 2018

Lord's Supper	29 March (<i>Thurs evg</i>)
Unleavened Bread	31 March-April 6
Pentecost	May 20
Trumpets	September 10
Atonement	September 19
Tabernacles	September 24–30
Eighth Day	October 1

A Festival Year

What's so strange? The festivals (listed above) indeed have names strange to those ears tuned to what passes for Christianity. Christians who happily embrace Eid, Duvali, Ramadan *etc* as integral to our multi-cultural lives seem strangely derisive of any professing Christians who observe these ancient—perhaps the most ancient—of annual Biblical festivals.

Christians may recognize two of the latter—the *Lord's Supper* and *Pentecost*, both of which feature prominently in the New Testament. The remaining five were also observed by the church—exclusively in its beginning—for centuries, before being all but smothered by the pagan culture that gripped the Roman Empire with its all-pervasive sun worship festivals.

Prominent was the annual celebration of the 're-birth' of the sun as it began its rise at the winter solstice—the *Unconquerable Sun*—celebrated on December 25. The paganized church absorbed the festival (with all its pagan excesses!) calling it *Christmas*, assigning to it the birth of Jesus (who was actually born in the autumn). The worship of the sun deity was also, in the fourth century, enshrined in Christianity by the weekly replacement of the Bible Sabbath with Sunday.

The remaining Bible festivals also refer directly to the life and mission of Jesus, confirming his identity as the Son of God, and the one and only Saviour of all mankind. Ω

because only through Christ is there access to the tree of life. (Infants, for example, may not have sinned yet they may die, and await their resurrection.)

Adam's sin, then, was no trivial 'bite of an apple'. His sin was the fundamental challenge he mounted to God's way, God's authority, God's covenant with His new creation. Ω

Insight from Paul

The apostle Paul's letters shed a bright light on our walk with God

How would you like to live in a nation without law? That's called *anarchy*, and many populations from time to time experience its horrific effects—social breakdown, civil disorder, damaged infrastructure. No—we want 'law and order'. We want a caring and visible police service. We want our courts to properly apply the rule of law honestly and without prejudice. We want our social support systems to function in peace.

It is, however, our human nature to 'slip the lead', to obey only which law suits us individually—if we think we can 'get away' with it! We need the constraint of law, with its penalties applied mercifully. Otherwise anarchy.

Why then, such furore among Christians in regard to the 'law of God'? That law addresses our basic nature—it is the 'natural [in-built] law'. The more we embrace it the closer we come to 'perfection', to maturity, to mental and physical health. The laws of nations are a reflection, a pale reflection, of that perfect divine law.

The apostle Paul understood this perfectly. He sums up his understanding in writing to the brethren in Rome (*ch 13:1-10*). God, he says, has delegated this matter of 'law and order' to the civil authorities (and woe betide them if they misuse it). Christians are advised to submit to the authorities. So if you truly love your neighbour (the last six commandments *v.9*), ie. if you are truly expressing God's Spirit, you will be following the precepts of His Law.

(As Christians, of course, we serve the one and only Creator God—the God of the Old and New Testament. We joyfully adhere to the *first four* commandments which identify Him, His 'mark'—the expression of our love for Him. *This is the unstated back-drop to all Paul's writings.*)

The apostle, on the other hand, is annoyed with those who while professing Christ yet insist on observance of this fundamental law as a requirement for salvation. The Law, he says, is '*...holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good*' (Romans 7:12). No degree of compliance with its demands (they are that) will gain entrance to the Family of God (*ie* 'salvation'). Only a heartfelt change of heart and dedication to the service of our Father through Jesus and his shed blood can we be reconciled to Him. Ω

Divided...we stand

Many brethren continue to hanker after the dream of a single unified church embracing all the varied assemblies, large and small, corporate or independent. Indeed one church group insists that all of us must gather under its roof in order to escape their projected terrors ahead of us.

It doesn't take much study of the Scriptures to demonstrate that this condition of 'corporate unity' has never existed—not in the New Testament church of God, and certainly not in the ensuing centuries under the shocking and corrupt history of the mediaeval church.

In the New Testament each assembly was self-governing while respecting other assemblies. Perverse human nature drove a move for domination by power-hungry 'Christian' leaders and the distortion of the title 'bishop', with the proliferation of myriad pseudo-religious 'titles'. Church leadership titles—even up to 'pope'—for over a thousand years became a commodity for sale to the highest bidder, or for sexual favours.

The simplicity of those first assemblies evolved to a multiplicity of church offices, becoming a secular world-dominating organization whose tentacles all but strangled the Christian faith. All dissent was smothered by the infamous Inquisition—enthusiastically endorsed by eighty popes over five centuries—by which thousands were hideously and callously maimed and murdered and massacred, in the name of Jesus Christ. Those few who remained faithful to the Bible were more often than not cruelly martyred by the 'church'.

We are, perhaps, more civilised today (and civil law forbids murder). But the same tendency to dominate underpins the multiplicity of our denominations. Assemblies with little to divide doctrinally gather to worship separately, sometimes in the same building at the same time! The clue? The ruling clique, the apostle, the 'king' inherits a band of devoted, but often unthinking, followers in support. Once the reins of power have been gained leaders tend to keep a tight grip on their authority—and impose it.

It's time for change. Not to organizational union but for a return to the New Testament pattern of individual assemblies, serving the church and proclaiming the Good News of salvation through Jesus, and in co-operation with one another. Ω

DANGER...heresy!

The example and teachings of Jesus, wherever they have taken root, have underpinned the civilized behaviour of individuals and nations—in sharp contrast to the violent corrupt and decadent world into which he was born. Through his apostles he sowed the seeds of a law-abiding and peaceful society. Given the spiritual nature of this Kingdom—'...not of this world'—the Father wisely chose to invest in individuals, selecting those whom He personally would work with harmoniously throughout eternity. His church is the support network for those He calls.

That visible church, however, quickly lost its way and was taken over by domineering leaders craving power, while faithful brethren were driven underground—sometimes literally—and thousands martyred for faithfully retaining the faith of Jesus. Under the fourth century emperor Constantine church and state began to be melded into one deadly combination controlled by fear. Over time the church predominated, even controlling the secular authorities.

The instrument for control in the first instance was heretical teachings, warmly embraced by the dominant church leaders from the all-pervasive heathen culture (chiefly sun worship)—notably the ancient pagan doctrines of *heaven* (for the obedient) and a fiery eternal *hell* (for those who disobeyed the pope and his underlings). The entire western world, from emperors down, trembled under the threat of excommunication with the consequent penalty of burning for ever in an everlasting fiery 'hell'—after facing the horrendous tortures of the papal Inquisition. A climate of oppressive fear permeated the empire.

The same false teaching also stained many Reformed preachers. In the eighteenth century, for example, Jonathan Edwards famously '...hoped that the imagery and language of his sermon [*Sinners in the hands of an angry God*] would awaken audiences to the horrific reality that he believed awaited them should they continue life without devotion to Christ'. The concept persists with many fundamentalists.

False doctrines, in other words, cannot be tossed aside as irrelevant. Whether it's salvation only through Mary, false hopes of a 'place of safety', hierarchical church structures and power grabbing, salvation through works and law, the mass indulgences—examples of the roots from which spring deadly spiritual disease. Ω

Letter from England

Hello

What a turbulent year! Threats of nuclear annihilation, political turmoil at home and abroad, destructive terrorist and criminal activity—and barely balanced by occasional good news of medical advances or flashes of heroism and good deeds or a brief outbreak of peace.

Clearly we still need our police service—however weak—as the unruly and criminally-minded cheat and steal and mug and kill. We still need a standing military. We still need regulators with teeth to curb the excesses of the multi-nationals. Something isn't quite right with our supposedly rational human race, the so-called pinnacle of creation. There's a missing dimension to mankind! Can anyone fix it?

Jesus isn't interested (yet). 'My kingdom' he says 'is not of this world [*Gk kosmos*]' (John 18:36). He may overturn governments (he has done) or stop conflicts, or place individuals in positions of influence—but only to nudge us towards a certain end. *No*—the focus of the Father, the focus of Jesus is '...on this rock [*Christ*] I will build My assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against her' (Matthew 16:18).

God is in it for the long term. Our short sojourn on this precious planet is but the foundation for eternity. That takes planning. It takes preparation. And throughout the millennia of human existence the Father has been assessing individuals for a place in His Spirit Family. His way—the one and only true faith—has had its witness among us since the beginning. Our readers will be familiar with Enoch and Noah and Abraham among many other spiritual giants. And now the church, founded on Jesus and the apostles, is the latest phase of this selection process.

Despite apostasy and persecution and martyrdom individuals have withstood the ravages of 'the world, the flesh and the devil' whether from the civil authorities—or from the [apostate] church: '...the time will come when people will kill you and think they are doing God a favour' (John 16:2). True Christianity is, as said Jesus, no easy ride!

If you have committed to 'the way'—been baptized and have received God's Spirit—you must *daily* build spiritual strength through nourishing your spirit on God's Word, and applying what you see there (Psalm 1:1-2). Ω

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