

THE NATURE OF SIN... Degeneration, Regeneration And Reconciliationⁱ

Degeneration... how did we get into this mess?

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...” Romans 5:12

The Bible does not say that God punished the human race for one man’s sin, rather that the nature of sin, namely, my claim to my right to myself, entered into the human race through one man. But it also says that another Man took upon Himself the sin of the human race and put it away—an infinitely more profound revelation.

Hebrews 9:26b-28 But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people...

The nature of sin is not immorality and wrongdoing, but the nature of self-realization that leads us to say, “I am my own man (women)... I’ll do it my way, thank you very much!” This nature may exhibit itself in proper morality or in improper morality, but it always has a common basis—my claim to my right to myself.

When our Lord Jesus faced either people with all the forces of evil in them, or people who were clean-living, moral, and upright, he paid no attention to the moral degradation of one, nor any attention to the moral attainment of the other. He looked at something we do not see... namely, the nature of man.

- The apostle Paul wrote, “...*but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members*”. Romans 7:23

Sin is something we are born with and cannot touch—only God touches sin through redemption. It is through the Cross of Christ that God redeemed the entire human race from the possibility of damnation through the heredity of sin. God nowhere holds a person responsible for having the heredity of sin, and he does not condemn anyone because of it; otherwise children would be damned. Condemnation comes when I realize that Jesus Christ came to deliver me from this heredity of sin, and yet I refuse to let him do so! From that moment we begin to get the seal of damnation... degeneration!

John 3:18-19 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

The nature of regeneration... the birth of a new Spirit—of divine origin

“When it pleased God... to reveal his Son in me...” Galatians 1:15-16

If Jesus Christ is going to regenerate us, what is the problem he faces? It is simply this—we have a heredity in which we have had no say or choice. The truth is that we are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners. Yet, Jesus commands us to be holy, “*Be holy, because I am holy.*”¹ But we are not holy, nor are we likely to be; and if all Jesus Christ can do is tell us that we must be holy, his teaching only causes us to despair.

However, if Jesus is truly a regenerator—someone who can put his own heredity of holiness into those who “believe,” then we can begin to understand what he means when he says that *believers* must be holy. Redemption means that Jesus Christ can put into anyone the heredity nature that was in himself; and all the standards, the commands he gives us are then based on his nature being in *believers*. His teaching is meant to be applied to the life that he puts within us... not to our natural life. Our part is simply to agree with God’s verdict on sin as judged on the Cross of Christ... “*While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”²

Titus 3:5 “...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...”

The New Testament teaching about regeneration is that **when** a person is hit by his own sense of need, God will put the Holy Spirit into his spirit, and the Spirit of the Son of God will energize his personal spirit... “*until Christ is formed in you*”³ Scripture tells us this very clearly in passages such as Galatians 2:20, “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*” The moral miracle of redemption is that God can put a new nature into us through which we can live a totally new life... “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*” 2 Corinthians 5:17

A helpless sinner

When we finally reach the edge of our need and recognize that we are helpless sinners... then Jesus says, “*Blessed are you...*”⁴

- We must get to that point... God cannot put into us the nature that was in Jesus Christ unless we are aware of our need for it.

God’s law says that all sin demands the death penalty and since I am a sinner and have sinned many times, there is no way I can avoid death... I am helpless! Just as the nature of sin entered into the human race through one man, the Holy Spirit entered into the human race through another Man. And regeneration means redemption and that means we can be delivered from the heredity of sin... through Jesus Christ we can receive a pure and spotless heredity, namely, the Holy Spirit.

¹ 1 Peter 1:16

² Romans 5:8

³ Galatians 4:19

⁴ Luke 6:22

A sufficient substitute

Jesus, God himself came to this earth to live as a man... he was perfect—sinless. Because he had no sin of his own to die for, he could die for someone else’s sin. In his love he died in our place—taking the consequences of our own sin on himself. One songwriter wrote, “When he was on the cross, I was on his mind.”

Hebrews 2:17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

As evidenced by Jesus’ resurrection, God accepted his death as an overwhelmingly sufficient payment for our sin—a fulfillment of the requirement of his holy law. In Christ, our resurrected Savior, everyone who “believes” has a perfection that is not their own, but is counted as theirs because of their trust in him.

A holy God

God exists in all his majesty, being the Creator-Owner of the universe. He is love—therefore he is a loving, caring God. But *equally* he is a holy lawgiver and his holiness demands that his law be kept perfectly. He can have nothing to do with any lawbreaker... only perfect people can live with a perfect God.

- In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus expounded the fundamental truths of the kingdom of God saying, “*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*”⁵

1 John 1:8-10 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

The nature of reconciliation... restoring *believers* to a harmonious relationship with the Lord

“*He made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” 2 Corinthians 5:21 Sin is a fundamental relationship—it is not wrong doing, rather it is wrong being—it is deliberate and determined independence from God. The Christian faith bases everything on the extreme, degenerate nature of sin. Other faiths deal with sin—the Bible alone deals with sin... the real problem!

The first thing Jesus Christ confronted in people was the heredity of sin. In Matthew 4:17 we see this, “*From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’*” It is the core of the gospel message and its explosive power to transform lives. The revealed truth of the Bible **is not** that Jesus Christ took on himself our fleshly sin. God made his own Son “*to be sin*” that he might make the sinner into a saint.

⁵ Matthew 5:48

It is revealed throughout the Bible that our Lord took on himself the sin of the world through identification with us, not through sympathy for us. He deliberately took on his shoulders, and endured in his own body, the complete, cumulative sin of the human race. “*He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us⁶...*” and that by so doing he placed salvation of the entire human race solely on the basis of redemption.

- Jesus Christ reconciled the human race, putting it back to where God had created it to be.
- And now anyone can experience that reconciliation—being brought into oneness with God, on the basis of what our Lord has done on the cross 2004 years ago.

A person cannot redeem himself—redemption is the work of God, and it is absolutely finished and complete the moment it occurs in anyone who *believes*. And its application to individual people is a matter of their own individual action or response to it... by *faith* and by *faith* alone.

Romans 3:22-25 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

ⁱ By Dan Scheel based on Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*, Updated Edition, October 5, 6 and 7

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:21