

The Beginning and End of Sin

We are not told how much time passed between God's Day Six observation that everything He had made was "very good" (Gen. 1:31) and the conversation between Eve and the serpent (3:1-5). Suffice it to say that it was a relatively short time from the beginning of the world to the beginning of a problem.

The world was of God's making, and the problem was of man's making. This is not to excuse the serpent (a.k.a "the Devil and Satan" - Rev. 12:9). We, the created, are all to be blamed (Gen. 3:12-19; Rom. 3:9-23).

Some are more inclined to blame God for creating the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, its prohibition, Satan, or the world. These inventive complaints are typical of a culture which demands independence and autonomy but shuns personal responsibility or bewails the consequences of its choices. We can't have it both ways, but this does not keep us from complaining either way.

Freedom of choice and self-determination bring the inevitable demand of responsibilities. Freedom from the constraints of responsibilities relegates us to the status of animals under the constraints of instincts or cages and oblivious to anything different. Having been created in God's image, we have freedom, including the freedom to ignore God's will and to reason for ourselves.

There is much to be learned from the beginning of the problem of sin which still has application to us. Satan's consistent mode of operation is to take what is good and twist, sully, or otherwise pervert it into ways to serve ourselves rather than God (cf. Rom. 7:8-13). He does this through subtle emphasis on the negative (Gen. 3:1), distortion, contradiction (3:5), and appeals to our flesh and

pride (3:6).

He does this not for our good but for himself (1 Pet. 5:8).

We recognize the rationalizations Eve used to talk herself into choosing sin because we have used them ourselves. We have felt the strong appeal of fleshly appetites. We have been allured by something attractive. We have desired greater knowledge and understanding. There is nothing inherently wrong with any of these. Yet, when these wants and desires trump God's will, we sin.

Contrast the free but selfish attitude which rationalizes our sins with Jesus' equally free but selfless "nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Lk. 22:42). Then stand in awe that those selfless words were said in submission to His Father's will to make "Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Sin is an ugly word. Efforts to point out sin are often met with derision and mockery. To many, sin is not ugly but to name something as sin is ugly (mean-spirited, judgmental, intolerant, unloving, etc.). This twisted, backward thinking results in the mislabeling of good and evil which is the signature of Satan (Gen. 3:4,5). Isaiah warned, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isa. 5:20). Yet, even among professing believers in God there are those who are inclined to diminish the seriousness of sin, forgetting the nature of sin and its end result.

"Sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4). It is transgression of the law of God. To sinners, sin may seem to be par for the course of human life ("I'm only human" is the standard excuse for sin.), but to God sin is offensive and no light problem. It is presented from the beginning as the preeminent problem because of its end.

Sin ends in death. God said as much from the beginning. "In the day that you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Though the word sin is not specifically used in this context to identify what Adam and Eve did, it is later referred to as sin (Rom. 5:12-14). While some are inclined to dismiss eating forbidden fruit as a relatively minor infraction, God's Word does not. It is this first sin which opens the door to all future sin and is the basis of the remainder of God's revelation of grace. To diminish sin is to diminish its consequences and to diminish the love and grace implicit in the solution to the problem.

The word sin is first used in the story of Cain and Abel. As Cain's unjust jealousy and anger intensified, God warned him that "sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). Sin is personified as a visitor to whom we should not give an opening lest it rule over us. In disregard of that divine counsel, Cain murdered his brother and revealed the ugliness of sin and its association with death. Sin kills.

Sin is a problem common to all, not by inheritance but "because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). The end result is that our sins separate us from our holy Creator (cf. Isa. 59:1-3). In the day that Adam and Eve sinned, they were removed from the garden of God and from access to The Tree of Life (Gen. 3:22-24). Sin "brings forth death" (Jas. 1:15). While death is the end result of the problem of sin, thank God this is not the end of the story. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). **By ANDY DIESTELKAMP**