

201 Little But Large

In Parliament or the media we very rarely hear mention of "sin" these days - truly a little word in itself yet with such large implications. Personal sins of public figures are described as - "an error of judgement a moment of madness a silly mistake made at a time of great stress entirely out of character sincerest apologies" and so on. Foul atrocities by terrorist groups may be described as evil, wicked or barbaric, but never as "sinful".

Why we might ask is there this reluctance to call sin by its proper name - "sin"? The answer is not hard to find: "sin" is a definition of behaviour that is wrong in the eyes of our Maker, Almighty God Himself, and the Ten Commandments are a pretty good example of what He is meaning! To speak of sin is therefore unavoidably to acknowledge the existence of the God who made us and to whom we are all accountable. Now sadly we are all too familiar with the extreme reluctance of opinion-formers and law-makers in the West to acknowledge any such Being - because He might just get in the way! This refusal to speak of sin, with the divine implications that go with that word, means that the many deep-seated, sin-sourced problems faced by us all these days are never properly diagnosed, so it is no wonder that they linger, fester, and grow.

We think back to Joshua Chapter 7, when God's people were unexpectedly defeated outside Ai. Immediately Joshua sought the cause - "God must be displeased with us, so where is the sin in our midst?" (verse 6ff). The sin was unearthed (literally, verse 22), and Achan and his people and possessions were destroyed - an all-too-stark reminder that sin against God matters, and its consequences may spread far beyond the perpetrator.

Even in the life of the church, those of us with preaching responsibilities will be familiar with a common reaction from the congregation at the mention of sin - the eyelids droop, the sleepy thought drifts in - "Off he goes again, I know all this stuff, blah,blah, blah - time for my nap"!

Of course sin is not just a boring little word which we have now all outgrown - it lies at the very heart of the relationship between the perfect, holy God and His imperfect, unholy - sinful - people. "Sin" is our state, "sins" are the many expressions of that state, and "sinfulness" is our tendency to function within that state. We can imagine two magnets, the Creator and the created, designed to be linked together. But sin has twisted the magnet of the created back to front, so now even if it approaches the Creator (which because of its sin it cannot do and does not want to do) it is repelled because of its wrong, sin-riddled alignment.

We are all affected with this disease, and are all powerless to get rid of this disease by our own efforts (eg., Romans 3.23 / 7.15-25 / I John 1.8-10 /). It is at that point, when the penny finally drops that in our natural state we are in serious trouble before our Maker, that the Christian Gospel enters the scene, and of course, perhaps for the first time, makes perfect sense. We can't heal ourselves, but God Himself has done the healing for us. Our Lord Jesus Christ, uniquely sin-free in Himself, has stepped in to take the punishment of estrangement from God which is due to each one of us who are far from being sin-free (eg., Mark 15.34). Jesus has settled the debt, meeting the righteous demands of the holy God, and has "opened the life-gate that all may go in" as that fine old hymn puts it.

There we have it. Sin is sin, but its grip has been broken by the loving intervention of Almighty God in His Son Jesus Christ (eg., I Corinthians 15, all of it!). By the simple act of faith that "Jesus Christ is Lord", that back-to-front magnet is swung back round to its original alignment, and we are given "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" with all the present and future blessings that that involves (Romans 10.9 / 5.1 /).

The world loves to "call a spade a spade" - we Christians can encourage the world to "call sin sin". That little step exposes the Bad News, and from there is a second little step which by God's mercy quickly leads on to the largest and Best News there has ever been.

© 2016 Faithful Sheep Ministries - www.fsmins.org