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"What Then Is Sin?"

"And He, when He comes will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged" (John 16:8-11).

Although the word "sin" is flaunted in various religious circles, there are many who either take it lightly or are apathetic about its reality. Some have even gone as far as to define sin simply as a weakness or a mistake. Psychologists are often swift to diagnose their patients as dysfunctional. In order to discover the root of the problem, they would unearth the personal history of the patient. Granted that a person's family history does affect his or her perception of life, we cannot ignore the sobering fact that the fundamental problem of human beings is sin. Everyone has sinned and (or) has been sinned against.

What then is sin? What actually is the nature of sin? It is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature. Sin is here defined in relation to God and His moral law. Adam and Eve's eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, is in many ways typical of sin generally. Their disobedience struck at the core of three important issues.

First, their sin struck at the basis of knowledge, for it gave a different answer to the question, "What is true"? God had warned Adam of the danger of eating from the forbidden tree. We read the sobering words in Genesis 2:15-17, "Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die'" (cf. Gen. 3:1). The serpent, however, contradicted God's word: "You surely shall not die," he fatally promised Eve (Gen. 3:4).

Secondly, their sin struck at the basis for moral standards, for it gave a different answer to the question, "What is right"? God had said that it was morally right for Adam and Eve to abstain from eating the fruit of that one tree (Gen. 2:17). Nevertheless, instead of allowing God's words to define right and wrong, they trusted in their own evaluation of what was right and what would be good for themselves. So we read, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and gave it to her husband with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6; cf. 1Jn. 2:15-16).

Thirdly, Adam and Eve's sin gave a different answer to the question, "Who am I"? The correct answer to this third question is that humans are creatures of God, dependent on Him and always to be subordinate to Him as their Creator and Lord. But Eve, and then Adam, succumbed to the temptation to "be like God." The serpent beguiled them with enticing words. He said to Eve, "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). In their desire to "be like God," they were actually attempting to put themselves in the place of God. At the root of sin is rebellion.

The upshot of all this is that human beings are sinners. But that is the very reason why God became incarnate in His Son Jesus Christ. The confession of the New Testament Church is that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1Tim. 1:15; cf. Matt. 1:21). And no one can be saved from sin until he or she has acknowledged this truth. Moreover, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to show us that we are sinners. The church’s task is to constantly beseech Him in prayer that He may convict the world of sin, judgment and righteousness.

By God’s Grace and for His glory,

Pr. Francis