

## WHAT IS SIN ?

Sin is used in two ways in Scripture: to describe an act, and to define a condition. In *Elpis Israel*, Brother Thomas writes:

"The word 'sin' is used in two principal acceptations in the Scriptures. It signifies in the first place, the transgression of law; and in the next, it represents ~~that~~ physical principle of the animal nature, which is the cause of all its diseases, death, and resolution into dust. It is that in the flesh 'which has the power of death'; and it is called 'sin', because the development or fixation of this evil in the flesh, was the result of transgression . . . ." (p.113).

"Sin, I say, is a synonym for human nature. Hence, the flesh is invariably regarded as unclean" (p.114).

"This view of sin in the flesh is enlightening in the things concerning Jesus. The Apostle says, 'God made him sin for us, who knew no sin' (2 Cor. 5:21); and this he explains in another place by saying, that, 'He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh' (Rom. 8:3)." (p.115).

"Children are born sinners or unclean, because they are born of sinful flesh; and that which is born of the flesh is flesh or sin. This is a misfortune, not a crime. They did not will to be born sinners. They have no choice in the case; for, it is written, 'the creature,' that is, the animal man 'made made subject to the evil, not willingly, but according to the arranging of hope (Rom. 8:20) . . . Hence, the Apostle says, 'by Adam's disobedience the many were made sinners' (Rom. 5:19); that is, they were endowed with a nature like his, which had become unclean, as a result of his disobedience" (p.116).

This view of flesh, so consistently set forth in the Word, so prominent in our standard works,

provides the starting point of the doctrine of the Atonement, and therefore, of the Truth. At the same time, it tolls the death-knell of the clean-flesh theory.

If human nature is termed "sin," it obviously cannot be considered "clean" as alleged by that theory; nor aligned with the "very good" state in which it was created, as defined in Genesis 1:31; Ecc. 7:29; Rom. 8:20.

But is human nature described as "sin"?

The Renunciationists, and related theories, deny that it is. They claim that sin is only used in the sense of transgression. A Queensland corespondent claims that John's definition ("sin is the transgression of the law" — 1 John 3:4) holds good wherever the word "sin" occurs.

But does it?

Certainly not if the Scriptures are carefully considered.

For example, Paul wrote: "He (God) hath made him (Jesus) to be sin for us who knew no sin . . . ." Did God make Jesus to be a transgressor of the Law?

Of course not!

But at this point, the theorist will impatiently interject that here the word "sin" is used in the sense of "sin offering": "He made him to be a sin-offering . . . ."

Whilst we do not agree with this interpretation (for we believe that the quotation is clearly stating that whereas Jesus came in

our nature — synonymous with “sin” — he did not succumb by transgression), we point out that once the clean-flesh theorist acknowledges that the word “sin” relates to anything other than “transgression of law,” (in this case, to the “offering” instead of the “offence”) he concedes the basis of his argument, and acknowledges that “sin,” as used in the Bible, must be interpreted according to its context.

Let us consider John’s definition of sin. We shall find that he provides three definitions of the word.

Firstly, we have the definition quoted above: “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). In fact, John did not write thus. In the Greek, the words “transgression of the law” are a translation for only one word: *anomia*, which signifies “no law” or “lawlessness.” The reference should read, as it does in other renditions: “the sin is the lawlessness.” According to the context, it defines a kind a sin which true sons of God will never commit, because they are begotten of God by “His seed” (1 John 3:9), or His word (1 Pet. 1:23). This alerts them to the law of God, so that they are not lawless, even though they might break the law through weakness of the flesh.

John did not write that “sin is the transgression of the law,” but rather “the sin is the lawlessness.” He was referring to the gravest sin of all, which is complete rejection of the authority of the law of God.

The translation of the A.V. obscures this vital point.

Later in his epistle (1 John 5:17), he gives a further defini-

tion of sin, writing: “All <sup>should be</sup> ~~righteousness~~ <sup>unrighteousness</sup> is sin; and there is a sin not unto death.”

The word “unrighteousness” is translated from *adikia* and signifies “wrong-doing.” John teaches that whereas a true believer cannot be guilty of the sin of lawlessness (because he knows the law), he can be guilty of wrong-doing. Therefore, he urges: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (*adikia*).

The person who commits the sin of unrighteousness (wrong-doing) acknowledges the existence of law, and regretting the weakness of the flesh that results in him breaking it, pleads the forgiveness of God on the grounds of his flesh-weakness.

The person guilty of the sin of lawlessness has no regard for the law of God at all, and therefore breaks it with impunity.

Here, then, are two definitions of sin. John also provides a third. He uses “sin” to describe human nature, as well as the act of transgression. He writes:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

Notice that John does not say, “If we say that we do not sin,” but rather, “If we say we have (possess) no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

That is exactly the stand adopted by clean-flesh theorists. They claim that the flesh is in the “very good” state in which God created it, and has not been defiled by sin. They claim that “sin” is an act we perform; not something we possess. John

taught that it is something we have, or possess; and it is also something we do.

In the place quoted above, the word *hamartia* (sin) is in the singular number, and without the definite article, and thus points to nature and not the act of sin. Thus the Diaglott translates: "If we say we have not sin . . ." John would have us recognise our sin-nature, and to guard against it. If we do not do so, he claims, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

False theories of the Atonement lead to the state of self-deception in which the truth is denied.

Those who claim that the flesh is clean, that it is in the "very good" state in which it was created, and who allege that it can of itself, without the help of God, manifest a state of sinlessness so that Jesus could render perfect obedience apart from His Father, "deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them."

In the next verse, John shows that we not only possess a sin-nature, but we give way to it:

**"If we confess our sins (plural), he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (wrong-doing)."**

Sins, active transgression, are the natural corollary of a sin-nature, and so John aligns them one with the other.

Christ did likewise. He used the singular and plural terms in conjunction with each other, in such a way as to suggest that John drew his usage of the terms from him. The Lord told the Jews:

**"Ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins" (John 8:21).**

But though the word is trans-

lated in the plural form, in the Greek it is in the singular. "Ye shall die in your sin," in the sphere of your sin-nature. Then later (v.24):

**"Ye shall die in your sins."**

Here the word is in the plural, showing that Christ was revealing that their actions would be in accordance with the flesh.

It is obvious that "sin" is used in two ways both by Jesus and by John, otherwise why the peculiar grammatical construction? Why the use of the singular and plural forms of the word in conjunction? Why is "sin" used as both a noun (describing a thing) and a verb (describing an action)?

Consider the use of "sin" in the following places, and try to align them with the definition: "Sin is transgression of law."

**"By one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Rom. 5:19).**

Were many "made" transgressors of the law by the disobedience of Adam? To teach so, would be to accuse God of unrighteousness, as suggesting that the descendants of Adam were considered as actual transgressors of the law merely because he disobeyed.

When, however, we understand "sin" as a synonym for fallen human nature, we can interpret the passage without adversely reflecting upon the righteousness of God. Through one man's disobedience many became related to sin by possessing the condition of human nature that came through sin.

**"Sin hath reigned unto death" (Rom. 5:21).**

Does an individual act of transgression reign as a king? Of course



not! What, then, reigns? The answer is sinful flesh. Again "sin" is related to fallen human nature, with its proneness to transgress, and its state of mortality.

What is the "body of sin" (Rom. 6:6), but the body of human nature?

What is meant by the term "ye were the servants of sin" (Rom. 6:17), but that we were once slaves of the flesh. What is the "sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:17) but the promptings of human nature?

Give these places the definition of active transgression, and they fail to make sense.

#### Christ's Death To Sin

Paul taught as basic to the doctrine of the Atonement, that Christ "died unto sin once" (Rom. 6:10). Did he die unto "transgression of law"? If he did, then he was a sinner; for if that interpretation were given to the word "sin" in this verse, it would teach that he actually transgressed

the law, and died unto this!

What he put to death was the flesh, here referred to by the synonym of "sin." He put to death the demands of the flesh during his life, and in the manner of his death. What he did, we are expected to do, so that Paul states: "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein" (Rom. 6:2).

In what sense can it be said that we are "dead to sin"? In the same sense as it is said that Christ "died unto sin," by putting to death the flesh, or "mortifying" it (Col. 3:5).

So "sin" is clearly used for human nature; but why? Because human nature, as we know it today, came as a result of sin in the first place, and is now the main cause of sin on our part. In the Garden of Eden a serpent tempted Eve to sin; that is not needed today, for the influence of the serpent has lived on in mortal flesh, so that when the flesh dominates, the serpent speaks again.

—H.P.M.

#### House In Jerusalem As Titus Left It.

The *Jerusalem Post* reports that archaeologists have found a structure in Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter left untouched since the Romans devastated it by fire 1900 years ago. Vessels inside indicate it was a workshop. Numerous coins strewn on the floor date the site. Professor Nahman Avigad, director of the dig, claimed that this is the only building ever found in Jerusalem exactly as it was left by Titus' conquering army in A.D.70. "It is an emotional, almost shocking, experience to actually witness the destruction which we know of from literary sources and previously incomplete archaeological remains," Professor Avigad said. He provided the following description: Signs of a huge conflagration are everywhere. Walls and wooden beams have collapsed. White limestone was burnt red and the wall plaster charred black. The floor was covered by ashes. One room appears to have been a kind of pharmacy. Apart from cooking pots and jugs typical of the period, there were stone jars, measuring cups, many weights, and mortars and pestles. Two ovens were hollowed into the ground. In the second room were found a large number of iron nails, indicating that carpentry work was done here, and moulds for casting coins. Of the coins so far studied, the latest dates to 68 A.D.