

Sin

James 1:14-15

14 . . . each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.
15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:13-15 (ESV))

Sin! Sin is usually defined by most believers in relatively simple terms. Some will say that sin is “any transgression against the laws of God”. And that is exactly right. Others point out that in the Greek, the word sin means “to miss the mark”. And that also is exactly right.

But dear friends, “sin” is so much, much more than any simple definition that rational thought might apply to it. Sin is an enemy to our soul, an insidious enemy, by far the greatest enemy we will ever encounter. Sin is sinister and it is treacherous. Sin is crafty, it is devious and it is deceptive. Sin knows no boundaries and it respects no boundaries. And sin has only one desire as it navigates its way throughout the recesses of our soul. It desires to “have” us, to “own” us, to “control” us. We know that to be true, because God Himself told us so in some of the very beginning words of this bible.

Turn with me to Genesis 4. There in those words, we’re able to clearly see both the nature of sin, and exactly how sin works its way out within the heart and mind of a person, in this example the first-born son of mankind, Cain.

Listen to these words carefully and note how sin took place in the exact manner that James tells us it does. For Cain, sin began as a thought and a desire and then it slowly worked its way out into a murderous conclusion. Verse 2

2 . . . Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."
(Genesis 4:2-7 (ESV))

Here, both brothers, Cain and Abel, had brought a sacrifice to God. We aren't told the whole story, but both of these young men knew the exact sacrifice that would be acceptable to God.

God requires the shedding of blood to cover over and to cleanse sin, because "without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin." God had demonstrated that earlier with Adam and Eve, when He sacrificed the animal to make clothing to cover over their sin and shame.

So then, with both men, Cain and Abel knowing the exact sacrifice that God required, Abel obeyed, but Cain did not. Abel brought a sacrifice of a first-born lamb. Cain brought produce from the works of his own hands.

Now, Cain's offering may seem to be a really reasonable offering to you and me. Why? It's because we like to do much the same in our own relationship with God. We want to give Him the offerings that we are comfortable in giving. We decide how much tithe and offerings we want to give, and we quote as our defense those scriptures that tell us that we should be "cheerful givers" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Also, sometimes our attendance at church is "iffy", depending upon how we "feel" that day. And also, we will even witness to other people, but only when it doesn't embarrass us or the other person, and on and on.

So yes, too often we are more like Cain than like his obedient brother Abel. And that kind of behavior does not please God. We see that here in God's response to Cain. Those words again,

2 . . . Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."
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How often has this very same kind of thing taken place within our families. We tell our child to do a chore, but they don't follow through and do it. Instead, they later bring some kind of gift or peace offering to us, hoping it will satisfy us, but it doesn't.

Here, Cain wanted to worship God under his own conditions, but that wasn't acceptable to God. And God made that clear to Cain, and Cain became angry and dejected.

Fortunately, God knows our thoughts, and when we are being tempted to do something wrong, He will always provide us a way of escape from our temptation. Those words again from 1 Corinthians 10,

13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13 (NASB))

Here, God demonstrated His faithfulness. Knowing that Cain wanted to go out and kill his brother Abel, God warned Cain away from his sin, giving him a way of escape from it by saying,

6 . . . "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:6-7 (NIV))

Consider what was taking place within the heart and mind of Cain, especially as it relates to the words we are studying here in James 1 regarding sin.

14 . . . each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.
15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14-15 (ESV))

This very thing was taking place within Cain right at the moment God was giving him a warning.

Sin begins within each person's mind and heart, first as a "thought", and then as a "desire". Cain thought that his sacrifice should have been acceptable to God. That is the way of our "self-centered" heart and mind. And please understand that this is the very sin that Cain's mother and father had just committed. They also wanted to be able to make decisions for themselves, irrespective of God's desires and plans.

And here we see that their sin was then passed on to the next generation, to Cain. And unfortunately, Cain learned it well.

Here, Cain's sin began exactly as James tells us it does.

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15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14-15 (ESV))

Just as these words tell us, sin was born within Cain's mind and heart, first as a thought and then as a desire. Then he became angry because God rejected his sacrifice. And note the utter foolishness of Cain's response. Cain was angry at God, so he was planning to go out and kill a completely innocent other person, Abel. That is the way of sin! It makes no good sense at all.

And note carefully, the way that God describes sin. In verse 7, He tells Cain,
7 . . . if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:6-7 (NIV))

Folks, those are strange words indeed, incomprehensible to our ordinary manner of thinking. In these words, God actually describes "sin" as having a "mind" and a "will" of its own, a kind of independent entity within us that has the personality of a predatory animal that is able to "think" and to "plan" and then to "do" evil things, here, crouching behind a door, intending to pounce on us at an opportune moment.

And here also, God tells us that "sin" has the ability to "desire". Desire is a strong emotion that drives a person to do things. A strange thought indeed, because most of us think that sinning is just a matter of our breaking one of those laws that God has made, that as long as we "step around" those laws and don't break them, we will be just fine. But not so! Not so at all! Clearly in these words, sin is an "aggressive predator" that "hunts us down" and comes to get us. And sin can be relentless, as it obviously was with Cain, spurring Cain to go on through with his desire and to murder his innocent brother.

And the implicit warning coming to us from within these words is that sin does the same thing within you and me. It begins with a thought and then develops into a desire. And if that desire is left unattended, it will grow into a next stage, and then a next, and a next, as our minds "ponder" and "mull" and "churn". And then at some "trigger point" within our churning, sin begins to "master" us and to "have" us, and to "control" us and our behavior.

Whether our thoughts "churn on" about another employee where we work, perhaps we are angry about their poor work habits, or about their behavior. Or perhaps we have a whole other problem, a problem with "lust", and our mind "churns" with that lust, perhaps for another man's wife or a neighbor's husband. Whatever those thoughts and desires and lusts may be, left unchecked and unattended, those thoughts and desires can quickly turn into sin, and without warning burst out from behind that door, and we are

unable to contain it. Suddenly, we find ourselves caught up in and controlled by our sinful desires. And most often the consequences are devastating.

Sin is so devious and so very clever that most often it can “hide in plain sight”, and we seem not able to even know that sin is anywhere near us until it has already wrecked and ravaged the things most dear to us, our marriages, our families, our jobs, and sometimes even our whole life.

How is sin able to hide so effectively, within the recesses of our own souls, and us not be able to realize its presence? It can easily hide itself because sin is actually already a “part of who we are”. We didn’t just pick sin up somewhere along the way. We actually brought it with us into this world. A sinful nature is part of our DNA!

You and I, and every other person, were all born with a nature that is totally corrupt, so corrupt that its every thought and desire is “bent” towards sin. Let me say that another way. It is not that the “nature” that is born into us might someday, if exposed to the wrong elements, possibly sin. Our “nature” absolutely will sin. It has no choice. It comes into existence “totally depraved”, and absolutely unfixable, unable to be healed or nursed into good health.

Unfortunately, many even devoutly believing Christians believe otherwise, that because we were created in the “image of God”, our nature is basically good. And given the right opportunity, our “freewill” will step forward and do the right thing, that our sinful nature can then be “cured”.

But sadly, those who believe such things can’t have read or properly received the truths that these scriptures clearly tell us about sin and about our sinful nature. And there are many, many such scriptures. Just one of them is found in Romans 3, where God tells us,

10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."
(Romans 3:10-12 (NIV))

What is wrong with a nature like ours? Why can’t our sinful nature just be healed within us? The reason is, our sinful nature was never alive to begin with, even from our natural birth. We were not born innocent and then later fell into our sinful condition. Our nature was born dead within us, completely dead. And our efforts to get a dead thing to have life will always fail.

God tells us instead to abandon our old sin nature to its own death and to be “reborn” into the nature of Christ. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, “you must be born again”.

The only real cure for our condition is described for us in some of my favorite scriptures, found in Ezekiel 36. There God tells us,

26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
(Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NIV))

Our natural heart is a “heart of stone”, completely incapable of being alive. Because of that, God needs to put a whole new heart and a whole new spirit within us. And note, that as He puts a new spirit within us, He also puts His Own Spirit within us. It is then and only then that we will be able to “master” our “sin nature” as God commanded Cain to do in Genesis 4,

7 . . . sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:6-7 (NIV))

The only way for you and me to “master” sin is by the power of the continual indwelling presence of God’s Holy Spirit. And the only way that we can have God’s Holy Spirit living continually with us is for us to receive the blessed salvation that Jesus has provided through His shed blood on the cross.

From that moment forward, you and I truly will have everything we will need for life and Godliness. Listen as we close,

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.
13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will not be your master, since you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:12-14)

Praise the Lord! May we pray!