

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

December 17 - 21, 2007



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Interlude: **Prevenient Grace**

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day."¹

Fortunately, our 'total depravity' and our 'total inability' to work out our own salvation is not the last word. We are not left to our own devices.

A little boy was building a snowman while his father shoveled the walk nearby. After a while, the snowball he was rolling became so big that the lad could no longer move it. Watching him, his father asked, "Are you using all your strength?" "Sure am!" the little guy replied as he strained with all his might. "Well, not really," observed his dad. "You haven't asked me for help."

We are unable to save ourselves. But God offers us his grace and strength.

We cannot make up for our sins by good works. But Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our wrongdoing and he offers forgiveness as a gift.

We cannot generate faith,² but the Holy Spirit is given to us to nurture faith in us. He convicts us of our need for God and brings about an openness to spiritual things. He gives us understanding as we read the Bible. He arranges providential encounters with people/events/information that help the lights to come on and draw us to Jesus.³

The point of understanding the greatness of our need is not to make us hopeless. Rather it is to open us up to the grace of God and make us willing to receive the gifts and help He offers.

¹ John 6:44 (TNIV)

² Ephesians 2:8-9

³ See 1 Corinthians 2:14

December 18, 2007 **Sin as a Moral Evil**

*“You have neither heard nor understood;
from of old your ears have not been open.
Well do I know how treacherous you are;
you were called a rebel from birth.”¹*

Evil entered the universe as a result of sin, but not all evil is sin. For example, we experience ‘physical’ evil in the form of sickness, natural disasters and the like. These things have evil results in that they bring about a great deal of pain and suffering, but they are not ‘sin’ in the sense that someone is morally responsible for them. Sin in a ‘moral’ evil and this is reflected in both the Hebrew and Greek words that delineate sin in the Bible. For example:

- Actions that ‘miss the mark’ and are a deviation from the right way;
- A want of integrity or moral rightness;
- Revolt against right authority, being a rebel against God and a breaker of his covenants;
- Wicked, guilty departures from the law;
- Guilt for unfaithfulness, treason against God;
- Vanity;
- Perversion, distortion of nature.

The Biblical view is that these are not ‘illnesses’ or ‘natural’ calamities that have come upon us. They are not weaknesses, faults or imperfections for which we cannot really be held accountable. Sin is an evil, free, moral choice on our part. And so...

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.”²

¹ Isaiah 48:8 (TNIV)

² Romans 1:18-19 (TNIV) See also vv. 20-23; 1 John 3:4

December 19, 2007 **The 'Badness' of Sin**

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."¹

In the eyes of God (and therefore in the only reality that counts), the difference between good and evil is absolute. If one sins, one is guilty of moral evil. Since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, all of us are sinners.² All of us are 'evildoers'.

This is not to say that sin is without 'degrees' or 'gradations'. The actions of an Adolph Hitler or Paul Bernardo are certainly far more evil than those of the average human being and we are right to be morally outraged by them. However, this does not mean that we are innocent in the eyes of God. Our 'smaller' crimes are still crimes and worthy of punishment. Sin is still sin and it is evil in the eyes of God. There is no middle ground.³

And all sin is committed against God. Though our evil actions may be directed against other people, systems or even ourselves, they are a transgression against God's creations and a repudiation of his standards of right and wrong. Even when people are not consciously guided by God's word, their consciences testify to the fact that such universal moral law exists.⁴

Our tendency is to diminish either the seriousness of sin or our responsibility in it. When we do this, we deny God's diagnosis of the problem and infer that he is over-reacting. This lessens the glory of the Cross and forfeits our full share of its benefits.

¹ James 2:10 (TNIV)

² Romans 3:23; 5:12

³ Matthew 10:32-33; 12:30;

⁴ Romans 1:32; 2:12-14; 4:15; James 2:9

December 20, 2007

Guilty and Polluted

“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”¹

In free societies, an accused person is ‘innocent until proven guilty’. Before an all-knowing God, sin and guilt are instantaneous.

“Guilt is the state of deserving condemnation or of being liable to punishment for the violation of a law or moral requirement.”² When we violate the law of God, there is an obligation to satisfy divine justice. We ‘owe a debt’³ and guilt, whether we feel it or not, is the real burden that we bear. This penalty is fixed by the lawgiver and he is also the one who determines how the burden may be removed, either personally or by someone else.

The Bible also indicates that sin ‘pollutes’ or makes us impure.⁴ The contagion of sin first takes root in our essential being or ‘heart’⁵. From there it spreads to the will, intellect, affections and body.⁶

This is why the cross is understood to be both a means of pardon and healing. Our sins deserve death and Jesus died in our place. Our sins result in corruption, but his blood is the antidote.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”⁷

¹ Ephesians 2:3 (TNIV)

² Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 232.

³ Matthew 6:12

⁴ Job 14:4;

⁵ Jeremiah 17:9

⁶ Matthew 7:15-20; 15:19-20; Romans 8:5-8; Ephesians 4:17-19

⁷ Isaiah 53:5 (TNIV)

December 21, 2007 **Self-Help Doesn't Help**

“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.”¹

Sin is not just a matter of overt actions. It cannot be overcome by behavioural modification or willpower. A sinful heart (or ‘nature’) results in desires, attitudes, habits and motivations that are contrary to God’s moral law. Those inclinations lead to overt actions that are wrong before God. As the experience of Israel under the Law demonstrates, dealing with our actions is inadequate. It doesn’t go to the heart of the matter.

At the same time, we need to be careful not to use this Biblical truth as a means to try and avoid personal responsibility for our sin. Sin is a free, evil moral choice. It is indeed our fault and we need to own that.

Sin is not a popular concept in the ‘spirituality’ of many people today. In part this is because religions, including Christianity, use guilt in a manipulative way and people are aware of this. In part it is also because people in our culture excel at avoiding personal responsibility for anything.

But dealing with sin by pretending it isn’t there is like a mouse in a cage with a snake, trying to cover the latter with wood shavings to make the problem ‘go away’. The peril is still exists and it will get us. Avoidance won’t work. We need a Saviour and we need to embrace him when he reaches out to us!

¹ Galatians 5:16-17 (TNIV)