Understanding the Nature of Sin

By Michael McCleeary

We live in a society that sees nearly every matter in different shades of gray. Very rarely is there unanimous agreement about whether something is right or wrong. Even in the case of capital crimes, such as murder, many can be convinced that the person who committed the crime was justified in their actions. However, when we read the Bible we find that God sees everything in two ways: black and white, with no option for gray. Either something is sinful, or it is not; either something is righteous, or it is not. Therefore, it is important that we understand the nature of sin in a society that does not understand, nor seems to care to understand.

Sin defined – The Bible is very specific regarding what sin is, especially as John writes to the saints. We read in **I Jn. 3:4**, "…*sin is lawlessness.*" We also read in **I Jn. 5:17**, "*All unrighteousness is sin…*" While being generic, it is also encompassing. What is involved in lawlessness and unrighteousness? Throughout the New Testament, God defines for us what He considers right and wrong.

All have sinned – It is important to understand that God considers all to have sinned, as Paul writes in **Rom. 3:23**, "…*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*" Paul explains in **Rom. 7:7-12** that, because God gave us His law, we are condemned because the law points out sin in our lives. If it weren't for the law, sin would be dead. Yet, because God has made clear His definition of right and wrong, we have no excuse.

Process and eventual outcome of sin – James is clear on the matter of the process of sin when he writes in **James 1:14-15** regarding how sin is conceived within us. He says "…*each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*" We find then that the process begins within each one of us, starting with our own lusts and desires. If we allow ourselves to satisfy these desires, sin enters our lives. Sin leads to separation between us and God, and James is alluding to the fact that if we allow ourselves to continually give place to our desires, we will be spiritually dead permanently as we will not be willing to change and repent.

Because of sin, it is necessary to have a Savior – Paul writes in **I Tim. 1:15** that Jesus came to the world to save sinners. We find that sin separates us from God, and we must have a way to be reconciled back to Him. Jesus is the only way to achieve this. He died for our sins that we might be free from the bondage of sin. This takes place by obeying the Gospel. Jesus tells Nicodemus in **John 3:3,5**, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God…most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*" How are we "born again"? Peter says in **I Peter 1:3** that God, "*according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*" and in **I Peter. 3:21**, "*There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism…through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*". Baptism is how we are "born again" clean and pure, being forgiven of all past sins. Baptism is given this power by Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Sin is to be avoided, overcome – Since Jesus died for us that we might be freed from sin through baptism, it is necessary to also understand that we must continue to avoid sin afterward, as Paul writes in **Eph. 4:22**, and as the Hebrew writer says in **Heb. 12:1**. There is no continual cleansing that enables us to do what we want and not have to suffer the consequences. We can still receive forgiveness when we fail, but the goal is to perfect ourselves so that we do not sin.

Considering the nature of sin, we must have the proper mind and attitude regarding how terrible sin truly is, and make sure to submit ourselves to what God wants us to do in order to overcome it.