

WHAT KIND OF A SINNER ARE YOU?

by Walton Weaver

Sin is ugly. It enslaves the person who is bound to it (Rom. 6:16/; 2 Pet. 2:19; Jno. 8:34/. By it one is defiled (Jude 22-23; Rev. 3:4) and is brought to shame (Lk. 15:15-16). Sin separates one from God (Isa. 59:1-2). It makes scars that sometimes stay with people all their lives. For those who die in sin eternal damnation awaits them (2 Thess 1:1-9; Rev. 21:5-8).

Even the best of people sin. There is no such thing as saints and sinners. There are only saints and other sinners. "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10), "for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

Though some may be viewed as "the chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15) and others as "not far from the kingdom of God" (Mk. 12:34), all are sinners nonetheless. There are however different kinds of sinners mentioned in the Bible. It is important that we are able to identify and distinguish these different kinds of sinners. Whether we are able to successfully seek after God (Heb. 11:6) may well depend upon our understanding of these important differences.

The Alien Sinner

We often speak of those who have never been saved by God's mercy as alien sinners. The Bible speaks of Gentiles before they were saved in Christ as "separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Every person in the world who has never been reached with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ is alienated from God, having not been born of the water and the Spirit (Jno. 3:5), or, to say the same thing in other words, having never expressed their faith in Christ (Jno. 8:24) by repenting of their sins and being baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

The alien sinner needs to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-19). One is reconciled to God in Christ through the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13-16). Those who are "in Christ" are "new creatures" (2 Cor. 5:17) because they have been baptized "into Christ" (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27/, and having been buried with Christ "through baptism into death" (Rom. 6:4a), they have been "raised from the dead" that they "might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4b). This new life characterizes those who are now "in Christ," "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

Those Who Have Fallen Away

Then there are sinners who have been saved but have fallen away and need to be restored. James speaks of these when he says, "My brethren, if any among you err from

the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he who converteth a soul from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5:19-20).

Notice James speaks to "brethren" in these verses about some "among' them who "have erred from the truth." Their "souls" are at stake; they need to be "saved," their sins need to be "covered." This can be done only if they are "restored." So there is no question here as to what is involved. These people were once saved, but they need to be restored, or saved again. Simon is a case of one who was saved and then fell away. We are told that this man, like the other Samaritans (Acts 8:12), "also believed" and "was baptized" (Acts 8:13). Jesus had said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16). Simon really believed or else Luke was wrong in telling us that he did. For this reason we know that Simon was a saved man, just as much so as were the other Samaritans.

But Simon had a change of heart. He sinned in such a way that he fell away from the Lord. Peter said, "Thy heart is not right before God" (Acts 8:21). What did he need to do to be "restored"? Peter told him, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). Why did Peter tell the people in Acts 2:37-38 to repent and be baptized to receive forgiveness and then tell Simon to repent and pray for forgiveness? Because he was addressing alien sinners in Acts 2, but Simon was not an alien sinner. He was one who had already believed on Christ and he had been baptized to receive the remission of his sins. To one who was already a child of God, Peter said, "Repent and pray' that you may be forgiven.

The Faithful

There are others who are children of God, but they also sin occasionally even though they do not have a change of heart like Simon. The same Lord who saved them initially is ever ready to receive them in their times of need. He hears their cries and offers them mercy and consolation as they come before His throne of grace as their great High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16). John says, "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (1 Jno. 2:1-2).

Confession of sins committed against God and sins done against our brethren ought to be a natural thing for the Christian. The faithful Christian is one who is ever examining himself and acknowledging sins to God committed against Him and confessing sins to others he has sinned against. John also says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jno. 1:9). Faithful Christians are humble enough to acknowledge such sins and shortcomings both to God and to others (1 Jno. 1:8, 10). Of course, this necessarily implies repentance of such sins as a prerequisite (Acts 8:22; Rev. 2:5).

Conclusion

Whether one is an alien sinner, has fallen away from the Lord, or is a Christian with a pure and undivided heart but still fails occasionally, his salvation is dependent upon the work of God in Christ Jesus. Every sinner, no matter what kind, if he is to be saved, will be saved through the blood of Christ. One's initial salvation begins with faith in His blood (Rom. 3:24-26; Rev. 1:5; 5:9). His forgiveness of sins after that point is also made possible only through the blood of Christ (1 Jno. 1:7).