

2015-05-16

Took Away Sin not Sins? #1 (No swimming)

Hi all,

I grew up with the command not to go swimming for at least 30 minutes after eating a meal or I'd get a cramp and drown. As a child, it was never explained to me what a cramp was as I'd never experienced one, nor how that could make me drown in a pool not much deeper than my waist, but we followed that rule to the letter.

Ours was a round above-ground pool dad erected one summer, and I remember watching other kids swim while I sat waiting until that 30 minutes was up. "NOWWWW mom?" I would plead. "Well, it's almost 30 minutes, be careful, if you feel a cramp get out right away, we don't want you to drown!"

Since those days the '30 minute rule' has been proven false, what is called an 'urban legend', yet the belief persists that one must wait at least 30 minutes after eating to go swimming.

People do get cramps while swimming, but it is because of extreme exertion using muscles they haven't used in a while or aren't used to using that way rather than having just eaten, and people do sometimes drown as a result. But somewhere in the hazy past someone concluded his leg cramp happened because he had eaten 30 minutes earlier and an urban legend was born. People naturally connected the dots, though they are generally unrelated.

Sin versus sins

And so it is today I want to talk about the difference between sin and sins. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him he said: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* Why did he say Jesus takes away the sin of the world instead of He 'takes away your sins'?

*John 1:29.

Church culture connects the two like leg cramps automatically happen after eating, but like my example, they are not the same thing. Technically speaking, Jesus didn't take our individual sins on Himself, but rather the sin of the world on Himself.

Weren't we taught in Sunday School that Jesus took our sins on the cross, or that our sins put Him on the cross? How many preachers have painted a vivid and gory word picture of Jesus bleeding and dying on the cross with our individual sins killing Him? For John the Baptist's point, that isn't technically true however.

Getting to the root of the matter

From the sin of the world flows all individual sins, so if you take away the sin of the world then our individual sins are rendered powerless. Huh?

Romans 5:12 says it this way: "...because of this, through one man sin entered into the world and through that **sin** death entered the world..."

Adam didn't allow sins into the world, he allowed sin to enter the world. Think of it like a pomegranate, that delicious fruit that is filled with seeds. The sin of the world is like the whole fruit, and the individual sins are like all those seeds.

If you throw away the whole of the fruit you automatically throw away all those seeds contained within the fruit. Jesus removed the whole fruit, so the seeds are included in that act. Jesus took away the sin of the world, not our specific sins individually.

What is sin, exactly?

When I went through the Episcopal church confirmation class I was told sin is anything that doesn't please God. That left me wondering if someone could define for me what exactly what He liked and didn't like that I might please Him, but no one ever gave me that list other than the 10 Commandments.

And I've heard that sins make God angry and He would normally strike me down were it not for Jesus coming to stand up to what seemed to be a heavenly bully of a Father - go Jesus, keep Him away from me - was the image in my mind back then.

And there is a verse that says anything not of faith is sin* but that is in context about eating choices and eating what we eat as unto the Lord, not a blanket doctrinal statement. For years I didn't know the context, so I tried to figure out if taking a shower was somehow in faith or was that a sin, as well as other normal functions of life - am I in faith while eating lunch? Was I in faith while going to work? No one ever defined what being in faith was or wasn't so I gave up trying to figure it out. *Romans 14:23

Here it is

And in all those times people told me sin was anything not pleasing to God, or sin was something that made Him angry or that I hurt Him when I did it, no one ever actually referred to the Bible definition of what sin is. Fortunately the apostle John defined SINS and SIN in I John 3:4:

"Everyone who commits sin commits lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness." (NAB)

Notice the definition - committing a sin (sins) is a commission of lawlessness, and sin IS lawlessness.

SIN is lawlessness. So what is lawlessness?

Lawlessness is literally the 'throwing off of all rule', or 'the throwing off of restraint'. If you think of law as God's will, God's rule, God's government in your life and the world, then lawlessness as a word makes sense - it is the throwing off of the will (government or rule) of God, first in the earth and secondarily to you and I.

When we sin we are committing a tiny sliver, a portion of throwing off God's rule in that single area of our life so we can do the evil thing or the thing WE want to do rather than what He wants us to do. So the 'sin of the world' is the throwing off of God's will, God's rule or government in the earth.

What Adam did

What Adam did was to let into the world SIN not sins, law-lessness, the throwing off of God's government and rule in the earth. By letting in sin, then naturally sins followed.

Up to that point in Adam and Eve's life the idea of throwing off God's rule in favor of man ruling without God was unheard of, not even in their thoughts until the tempter made the suggestion they do so. They walked with the Lord in the Garden - they had never considered shutting Him out of their lives in order to do what THEY wanted to do - they just naturally wanted to do what He wanted to do.

They knew only good, they didn't know evil. Though more brilliant than Einstein but with the innocence of toddlers - who don't know or care they are naked.

The Bible says Eve was deceived into the transgression but Adam was not*. Adam committed treason.* He figured it out as Satan tempted them 'to be like God' and knew exactly what he was doing. He willfully allowed the throwing off of God's rule into the earth, and death followed*. *Hosea 6:7, I Timothy 2:14, Romans 5:12

It is that law-less-ness that Jesus took away, He carried on Himself the rule of man that throws off the rule of God, the singular SIN of the world - that is why Paul calls Jesus 'the last Adam'* - Jesus carried on Himself and removed the SIN Adam had released into the earth. *I Corinthians 15:45

Jesus took away the sin of the world, so that means individual sins have no power over us, and once you know that it can rock your world - more next week,

Blessings,
John Fenn

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2015-05-23

Took Away Sin not Sins? #2 (Orange face)

Hi all,

Fortunately when I was a young teenager Barb went to a different church, for if she had seen what I'm about to tell you our first date might never have happened - someone came out with a sun tan in a bottle and I fell for it.

It was advertised as easy, guaranteed, just pour some in your hand and smooth over your body and you would have an amazing tan. What a great idea I thought, I'll look great Easter morning with my new tan!

The first clue should have been the directions to use a gloved hand to apply it, but I passed that off as for sissy's. The second clue should have been the warning that it might turn people with light complexion orange, but I reasoned I didn't have THAT light of a complexion. Apparently I was wrong.

This was after all, the early 1970's and I had my Easter suit all set - white turtle neck sweater and a bright blue jacket. I mean the bright blue a televangelist might wear on TV - and as it turned out, a face as orange as an Oompa Loompa in the movie Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. I was 13 or 14 and to this day it is the most embarrassing moment in my whole life.

I had no choice as it wouldn't scrub off. And unfortunately that day was cloudless with the sun at a perfect angle to highlight my orange face against my white turtle neck sweater at the after service meal on the front lawn. I was always a big kid, so I was a giant Oompa Loompa at that.

I tried to reason the stares I received as admiration for my sharp look, but when that little kid ran away from me screaming I knew it was no good pretending. So I swallowed my pride and just told the truth to my friends and anyone who would listen - it was an accident, really! A horrible industrial accident! I didn't know what I was doing, really!

I couldn't apologize enough for my orange face as every time they turned to me to say something, they burst out laughing and had to turn away to collect themselves, then turn back to me to start to say something only to turn away in laughter all over again. I just wanted to go home and lock myself in my room.

Orange sins?

And that is so often the way church culture teaches about our sins when it should be teaching how Jesus took away the sin of the world. Understanding the difference changes everything. We are told we are like I felt - permanently stained and a laughing stock to God, that even though we are with Him now and our sins are forgiven, they are still somehow stained into our being and marking us until we get to heaven.

I imagined that as I committed a sin there was some sort of heavenly court, and as I asked one more time for forgiveness the Father would lean on His elbow towards Jesus and ask: "What do you think Son; should we forgive him again or make him sweat a bit?" and Jesus would answer, "He's done this before Father, lets make him sweat, let's give him half a day and then we'll forgive him."

Until one sunny day early in 1985...

I was driving north on I-25 through Denver with the Subaru's sunroof open, the sun was shining off the snow capped mountains on my left, and in contrast to the beautiful day, I felt horrible. I had done or said something that I needed to ask forgiveness for, and felt like a repeat offender coming before the judge for the same crime for the hundredth time to beg forgiveness I had no right to. So I put on a brave face saying:

"Thank you Father for your grace, thank you for your mercy and forgiveness, thank you for I John 1:9 that says if I confess my sin you are faithful and just to forgive my sin, and not just that, but it says you cleanse me from all unrighteousness. Thank you for your faithfulness to me to forgive me..."

And at that point the Father interrupted my prayer with a loud voice that seemed slightly exasperated and slightly indignant: "I'm not being faithful to YOU, I'm being faithful to the work of my Son on the cross!"

An image of a tree came before me and I could suddenly see the root system. Across the root system normally out of sight but visible to me was the label 'Sin of the world', and up the trunk was the word 'Death', and in the branches and over the many fruit on the tree was the label 'Sins'.

Suddenly I got it - Jesus killed the root! Individual sins flow from the root of the sin of the world through death to individual sins, meaning all sins would have their eventual conclusion in death.

Once the sin of the world was taken away, what remains is the withering leaves and fruit with no more life left in them. I was free! Jesus' focus on the cross wasn't on me, but the sin of the world, which was a much more efficient way of handling it rather than a heavenly court flipping a coin about forgiving me each time I sinned.

Nothing left undone

By taking away the sin of the world it meant there was no sin I could sin that wasn't already forgiven and taken out of the way. That said let me qualify the statement - Jesus did not die for Himself therefore the one sin not covered was rejecting Him. That is what it means to blaspheme the Holy Spirit who is the agent of salvation - He didn't die for Himself so to reject Him is to reject the work of the Holy Spirit which is salvation.

But...I do not reject Him so therefore when He took away the sin of the world all sins up on that tree, are dead, have no power. That is Paul's point in Romans 6:11 that we are dead to sin because sin is dead to us.

Battle from a position of having won

There is a stream of the faith that makes God our adversary and that if we get enough people praying the sheer numbers may persuade Him to act. That if we get enough people fasting their sincerity and sacrifice may impress Him enough to move Him to act. If we can gather enough people in one place to scream and shout and call down heaven then we can move Him to bring revival in the earth. He isn't our adversary.

Ephesians 1:3 says as a result of Jesus having taken away the sin of the world, the Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. Ephesians 2:4-7 says the Father brought salvation and has seated us in Christ next to Him at His own right hand for the purpose that in the ages to come He (Father) can continue to show us the riches of His kindness towards us.

We have been given the right to use the name of Jesus to command evil spirits away from us. Jesus never prayed for anyone to be delivered, He commanded spirits out and away. The apostles never prayed the Father to stop demons from harassing them, they commanded them out. We battle from having already won! We don't pray about demonic assignments, we use the name of Jesus to command them away!

Sinners sin because it is their nature to do so; Christians sin by choice

Ephesians 2:3 says before Christ we 'were by nature children of wrath'. That means our nature was to sin. But our nature has changed, we have been born again, sealed by the Holy Spirit. We are in the process of renewing our minds to think as God thinks, which means when we sin we do so by choice, not by nature.

We don't have an orange face anymore, stained by sin. "You were before darkness, but are now light in the Lord; Live as children of light." Ephesians 5:8

Jesus took away the sin of the world. Your individual sins, your past sins, today's sins if there be any, next years' sins - were all taken away in the sin of the world. That root is dead therefore the fruit that came from that root is dead. You and I are free to live FOR Him, using this amazing grace as empowerment to live holy and godly lives.

And that's where we'll pick it up next week, until then, blessings,

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2015-05-30

Took Away Sin Not Sins #3, (Wildcat Creek)

Hi all,

The summer I turned 16 Barb was still 15 and we hadn't started dating yet though I liked her; I just didn't have the nerve nor know-how to ask her out on a date. But that summer day I took a step closer - I had heard Wildcat Creek was flooded due to the heavy rains we'd recently had, and about 4 miles (6 km) west of my home was a neighborhood built around a golf course called 'Green Acres', and the Creek wound through it. I invited Barb and her best friend to float the creek with me and some friends.

Of course we didn't tell our parents we were going to float down a flooded, debris filled creek! (We told them the truth, we were going swimming, just not *where* we were going swimming. :)

Stupid, stupid, stupid

We would jump in and float downstream a few minutes, climb out, walk across the golf course to our starting point and do it again and again. The creek was flooded with branches and even small trees, and beneath the surface we knew the biggest danger was getting a leg caught in a sunken tree branch and being dragged under by the intense current. So we kept reminding each other to keep our legs tight under us as we floated, or better yet, float on the surface on our backs or stomachs.

We were nervous but we appeared brave and confident. We wore big smiles partly out of sheer joy and part not wanting to appear scared. Inside we WERE scared of being pulled under, but other than the occasional loud cry of pain after hitting a leg on a sunken tree, you'd never know it; all was calm on the surface.

When I dropped the girls back at their homes that afternoon we talked of multiple bruises on our legs, thighs, and backs from hitting underwater obstacles, but we thought that was the price to pay for the adventure!

Keeping up appearances

Like us floating down the creek appearing calm on the outside but beneath the surface doing all we could to keep our heads above water, religion tends to emphasize the outward appearance while never touching the inner appearance of the heart, which is often bruised and battered from life as our legs and thighs were.

How many of us have had that Sunday morning rush to church with dad yelling at mom to hurry up and mom yelling at little Joey to find his other shoe with everyone grumpy and angry up to the point the car stops in the church parking lot.

Then as if by magic snot disappears from little Joey's face, the sisters stop slapping each other, mom and dad forget the chaos and tempers of the morning, and in walks the perfect Christian family with smiles plastered across their faces as neatly as every hair has been combed or brushed into place.

Do you think God sees the outside of the perfect family, or the hearts of the perfect family?

What happened to Elijah

Elijah had an amazing victory over the prophets of Baal by God's fire consuming his sacrifice.* And God's demonstration of power fit neatly into the various religions in the area's idea of the gods - earth, wind, and fire - so it was a loud message to the people of Baal. They believed the gods were in - inhabited - those elements. Among other designations, Baal was the Canaanite Thunder God, so God answering by booming fire was a statement that He was more powerful than any god of earth, wind and fire. *1 Kings 18:16-40

But immediately after that Jezebel threatened Elijah's life and he ran in fear to a cave*. In his despair he complained to the Lord and the Lord responded. First was a very strong wind, but the Lord was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. Then came fire, but He was not in the fire.

Last came, in the Hebrew, "a sound like a whisper" or "a gentle whisper", and the Lord was heard in that whisper. *1 Kings 19:9-12

The idea of God being in the whisper was revolutionary. Every religion around Israel believed their god was external in the forces of nature - gods of the visual, of keeping up appearances, outwardly focused. But God revealed to Israel He was all about the internal, the invisible, the motives, the still small voice. He could be found in the heart, in the motives, in the whisper - and that was new!

The meeting at the cave changed everything

The Lord answered Elijah in the whisper of the heart. This God isn't like other gods, He is concerned with the innermost being. This God is a Spirit* and therefore He communicates to a person's spirit in the whisper.

The spirit of man is the home of our sense of self-worth, our purpose in life, our love of self, and this is where God demonstrated to Elijah that He lives. This God commanded Israel to love others as they loved themselves*, and no other god had ever wanted its subjects to love themselves and then express that love to others. *John 4:24, Leviticus 19:18

That moment at the cave changed everything, the cave represents the human heart, the hiding place where God whispers to us. David demonstrated he knew this as well, for when he was confronted about his sin with Bathsheba he wrote Psalm 51 in repentance, saying in v6:

"Behold, you desire truth in the inward **parts** (spirit and soul); and in the hidden part (spirit) you will make me to know wisdom." The spirit of man is where God sees us, requiring truth and revealing His wisdom.

Samuel learned this when he was sent to anoint the new king after King Saul backed away from the Lord and had to be replaced. Samuel went to Jesse's house and lined up all his sons, thinking the oldest, Eliab, would be the natural choice, but the Lord instead replied:

"...for the Lord sees not as man sees, for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7

Through the centuries leading to Elijah's cave experience, Israel had lost their way. Have we? Has church culture? Do we or our church culture focus on the whisper, or on the external expressions of appearance designed to attract and impress? Religions try to approach God on external terms, putting up a good front, like the prophets of Baal, thinking that is what He wants. But He is found in the internal whisper.

When Jesus took away the sin of the world, with all of our individual sins within that sin, Jesus took away all need for false appearances, any need for a facade, any need for a false front for the sake of the gods. Jesus made the way for us to be honest with ourselves, and with the Father. There is no fear in Him knowing us
way down where we whisper our innermost thoughts and motives to ourselves. He is in the whisper too.

And that is why this most humble God, the Father of the also meek and lowly of heart* Lord Jesus, says "Come with boldness to my throne to receive mercy and grace to help in a time of need."* He knows the heart for He lives in the whisper, so stop keeping up appearances and just let Him know how hard you are paddling beneath the surface, getting bumped and hit by unseen obstacles - whisper in your heart to Him and then pause to hear Him whisper back. Stop looking for Him in the earth, wind and fire. *Matthew 11:29, Hebrews 4:16

Close your eyes and listen for the whisper.

More next week, blessings,

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2015-06-06

Sin Not Sins #4 (Casting calories out)

Hi all,

"I don't understand what I'm doing wrong; I'm casting the calories out of my desserts but I've still gained 10 pounds!" (4.5kg) "John, I just want you to pray for me so the devil will never again tempt me with sex."

These 2 people wanted to avoid personal discipline and accountability by spiritualizing their issues. Jesus took away the sin of the world, so we shouldn't we be empowered to control various appetites?

Key #1 - Dealing with the pleasure of sin

For me, I learned long ago to confront temptation with the fact I love the fellowship of the Holy Spirit I feel in my spirit more than I love sin - so I focus on essentially, "Why should I do or say that sin when it would disrupt the sweet presence of God I feel in my spirit?" When I do that, turn my attention away from the temptation and onto my love for Him, the allure of the sin is instantly removed. I value my fellowship with Him much more than I value a momentary pleasure of sin.

Every person who has initially come to me for help with an habitual sin, as best as I can recall over these 40+ years of walking with Him, had never to that point been confronted with the fact they enjoyed the sin - which is the human condition - we love the sin.

They've wanted demons cast out, practical tips on not setting themselves up for sinning, and prayer to be strong - but had never thought about the key to it all - dealing with the pleasure of sin and what do you love more - the fellowship of the Spirit or the feeling that sin provides?

Hebrews 11:25-26 reveals Moses chose his path based on his love of God more than his love of the sins of Egypt. That is the heart issue each of us has to deal with - acknowledge the love of the pleasure x sin gives, then decide to crucify that love by making the choice to focus on our love of God when confronted with sin.

This point #1 is a heart battle that can take years, or merely a moment in time. A person must search down inside themselves with honesty, and down in that space, bring up how much they love the Lord, the fellowship of the Spirit, and think through how sin is a temporary high at best. Once a person settles their love of the Lord deep in their heart, sin will lose its appeal. Wrestling with the love of sin can take years.

Key #2 - Replace don't just stop

When John the Baptist was baptizing people he didn't tell them just to repent of sin, but to replace that sin with a righteous act*. Most of traditional Christian culture just says stop sinning, which isn't fully scriptural - the truth is to stop sinning **and then** replace it with something righteous. *Luke 3:11-14

Replacing one act with another is a redirection of thoughts and actions. If the computer is your gateway to sin then before sliding into that sin, get up and go do something else. Replace one action with another. If you open your mouth to exalt yourself above another or to plant gossip or seeds of strife, instead say something nice about the person. Replace sinful words with words of grace.

Key #3 - Don't think about how to do it

Christians in Paul's day were just like us. His advice was to settle in your heart that you love the fellowship of the Spirit more than you love the sin. Romans 13:14:

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make not provision** for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." Romans 13:14

The phrase 'put on' (the Lord Jesus Christ) is the word 'enduo' where we get 'endue'. Endue means to invest in, to empower, to provide a quality or authority in a person. We are endued with power in Christ but when confronted with sin, we must make a decision to walk in that - to 'put on' or empower ourselves in Christ.

The phrase 'make not provision' is the Greek word 'pronoia' which is made up of 'pro' (before) and 'noia' (to think). Paul is literally saying "Make a conscious choice to be empowered with the Lord Jesus Christ and don't think ahead of time how you will fulfill the lusts of the flesh."

These 2 elements - empowering ourselves in the Lord rather than thinking ahead of time how we will sin, can only be done through fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ - not a cold principle, but a focus on talking with Him and fellowship with and worshipping Him when tempted.

Redirect your thoughts to plans of something else rather than plans of how to sin. Replace one set of thoughts with another set of thoughts, replace your focus from the sin onto Him. Center on your love of Him.

Trend is to co-exist with the sin, to rely on grace

When a person wrestles with his or her love of the pleasure of sin, which can take decades, there is often a delicate 'demilitarized zone' established that results in an outward and true Christian life with a little sliver of sin kept back for oneself to enjoy now and then, in a hidden-to-the-eyes of man balancing act that isn't so hidden from public view nowadays.

All around us we have headline examples in the Christian world of believers 'coming out' with this or that lifestyle of sin, in what is in reality a revelation they've declared a demilitarized zone concerning their sin, they are tired of fighting it, so they've decided they are just going to live with it and let the world know. To me the issue isn't a sin issue, but a love of God issue, a lack of revelation with Him issue.

#4 - Walk in the Spirit

Co-existing with habitual sin isn't an option the NT presents, and Paul simply says "If you walk in the Spirit you won't fulfill the lusts of the flesh."*

For all the formulas out there, for all the positive confessions, for all the material on spiritual warfare and inner healing, Paul says simply to walk in the Spirit and if we do that, we won't fulfill the lusts of the flesh. That's what Moses did, and he did so because he resisted sin from choice of fact; that he loved God more.

Paul lists some of the works of the flesh, which is often in our day called demonic, as our culture tends to blame the flesh's desires as demonic - but Paul says the root is not demonic, but merely the flesh (demons can become involved, but the root is the flesh):

"Adultery (sexual imagination), fornication (act of sex outside of marriage), lasciviousness (absence of restraint, indecency), uncleanness (sexually perverted, morally unclean), idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance (cut in two, purposeful strife), emulations (jealousy, exalting oneself over others), wrath (explosive anger), strife, seditions (standing apart from others in strife), heresies (self-willed opinion which refuses to acknowledge or submit to the truth of a matter), envy, murders, drunkenness, revelings (drunkedness, carousing around) * Galatians 5:18-21

If we rebuke say, a demon of adultery without dealing with the sexual imaginations that originate in our own flesh, we'll never gain victory. Deal with the love of God and the love of sin as per #1 above, and then any demonic influence in the flesh will find no place and soon go off looking for someone else to tempt.

And the way to counter these sins is what he said before listing them: If you walk in the Spirit you won't fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

When I wake up the first thing I think/pray is "Morning Father, do you have anyone you'd like me to pray for?" Then I lay in bed for a few minutes praying quietly in my spirit as names flow through my mind, trusting as I pray in tongues He is providing the content of those languages according to His will. I love the fellowship with the Father, feeling the Spirit of God within - such peace, such assurance. I'm not perfect by any means, but I've tried to show in this series that Jesus took away the sin of the world, and then gave us the Holy Spirit so we could focus on our love for God, and fellowship out of that love in a normal conversational relationship.

New subject next week, blessings,
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