

What "sin" are you talking about?

When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed her husband, God sent Nathan the prophet to reprove him. Notice the order in which the reproof came. Nathan gave David a parable about something that he could understand – sheep. He began with the natural realm rather than immediately exposing the king's sin.

He told a story about a rich man who killed a poor man's pet lamb to feed a stranger, rather than take one from his own flock.

David was indignant and said that the guilty party would die for his crime. Nathan then exposed his sin of taking another man's "lamb" saying, "... You are the man! Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, doing evil in His sight?" (2 Sam. 12:7a, 9a Amp. Bible). When David showed signs of contrition, Nathan then gave him grace and said, "... The Lord has also put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Sam. 12:13b Amp. Bible). Imagine if Nathan, fearful of rejection, changed things around a little and instead told David, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. However, there is something which is keeping you from enjoying this wonderful life; it is called sin."

Imagine if he had glossed over the personal nature of David's sin with a general reference to all men having sinned and fallen short of the glory of God? David may have reacted with, "What sin are you talking about?" rather than admit his terrible transgression. Or, in a desire to experience this wonderful plan, he may have admitted that he, like all men, had fallen short of the glory of God.

If David had not been made to tremble under the wrath of the Law, the prophet would have

removed the very means of producing godly sorrow, which was so necessary for David's repentance. It is "godly sorrow" that works repentance. It was the weight of his guilt that caused him to cry out, "... I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13a). The Law caused him to labor and become heavy laden; it made him hunger and thirst for righteousness.

How true are the words once spoken by Charles Spurgeon (the prince of preachers), "The Law serves a most necessary purpose." He also said, "They will never accept grace, until they tremble before a just and holy Law."

Paradox though it may seem, the Law does make grace abound, in the same way darkness makes light shine. It was John Newton (the writer of "Amazing Grace") who said that a wrong understanding of the harmony between Law and grace would produce "error on the left and the right hand."

I don't know if any of us could claim to have a better understanding of grace than the one who penned such a wonderful hymn. The world will never clearly see the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ until the blackness of sin is explicitly painted on the canvas of a just and holy Law. When a Christian sees what he has been saved from, he will realize what he has been saved for – love for God, the unspeakable gift that will be a continual source of joy. Gratitude will motivate him to reach out and do the will of God, to seek and save that which is lost. That is the key to genuine Church growth, and that is how to see revival.

When we begin to apply the truth of this article into our evangelism, there needs to be the involve-

ment of the Holy Spirit in both softening the hearer to be able to perceive the truth he is hearing, and in guiding the person who is sharing the love of God. It is the Holy Spirit's job, not ours, to convict the sinner of sin. We are merely the vessels He uses to communicate the truth that draws men to Jesus. We need to share the love of Christ in a sensitive and gentle manner that exemplifies Him.

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

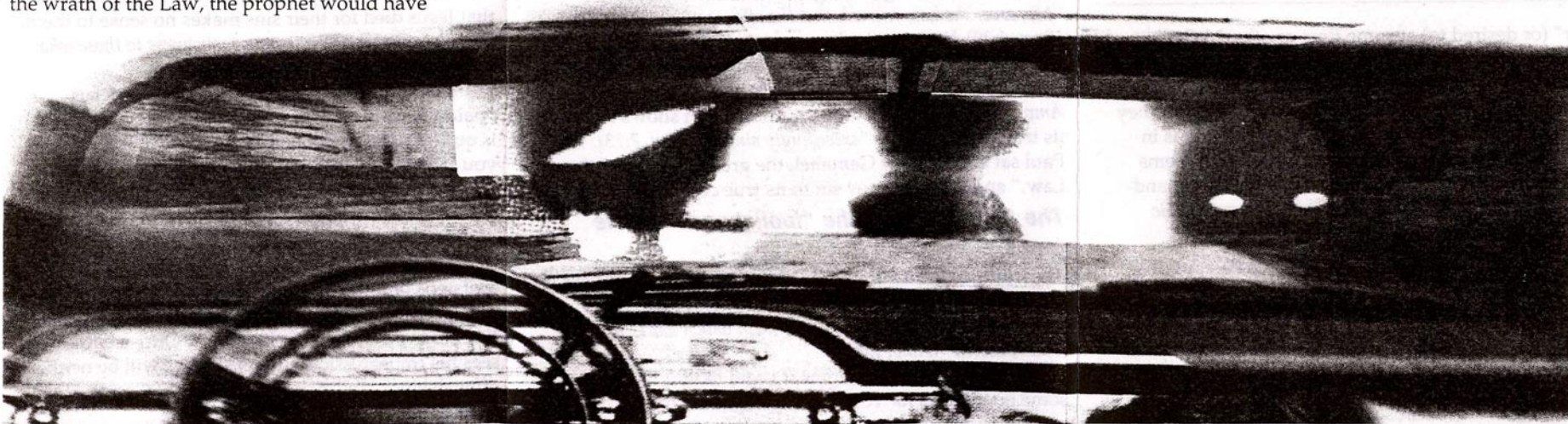
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I once came out of a store and saw a lady trying to open her car door by using a bent, wire coat-hanger. I asked if it was her car, or if she was stealing it. A smile relieved her face of obvious frustration. When I offered to help, she gladly handed me the coat-hanger.

It was apparent that the wire wasn't strong enough to grip the handle on the inside of the car door. So, as I chatted with the woman, I took some time in bending, twisting, and shaping the wire so that it had both the strength and the contours to grasp the handle. With great skill, I carefully lowered the newly-molded tool toward the handle, but to my embarrassment, the innovative instrument was now too short. It didn't even reach the handle!

It was then that I asked the woman to stand back. I was going to try my car keys in her car door. It was a long shot, but it would at least take attention off my obvious blunder. I slipped the key into the lock, then turned it. To our total surprise and delight, the door immediately opened.

Modern evangelism has bent, twisted, and shaped its methods in a sincere effort to unlock the heart of the unbeliever. To the embarrassment of many, our efforts have fallen short of the ideal. Yet, the key to the sinner's heart is, and always has been,

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close at hand to the Church. All it will take to open the door of revival is to abandon our own efforts and try the key to see if it does indeed work.

Out of a total of 11,500 assemblies, a major U.S. denomination had 7,872 respond to a questionnaire asking about church growth for 1991. The results revealed that a massive 294,784 decisions were obtained during that year. Unfortunately, only 14,337 remained within the Church. In other words, over 280,000 couldn't be accounted for. This 96% fall-away rate is a little higher than the normal for modern evangelism, where the average is 80-90%. Charles E. Hackett, the author of the report, said, "Something is wrong."

Something is wrong, and has been wrong for nearly one hundred years of evangelism, since the

Church forsook the key to the sinner's heart. It set aside the Ten Commandments in their function to convert the soul (*Ps. 19:7*) and to show us our true state, and thus see our need of God's forgiveness.

Romans 5:20 says, "Moreover the Law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound..." When sin abounds, grace "much more" abounds, and according to Scripture, the thing that makes sin abound is the Law.

We can often see the work of God's Law illustrated in civil law. Watch what often happens on a freeway when you are traveling. When there is no visible sign of the law, see how motorists transgress the speed limit. Everyone knows the maximum is 55 mph, but watch how they all naturally flow together at an unlawful 70 mph. It seems that the law has forgotten to patrol this part of the freeway. You are just "going with the flow." Besides, you are only transgressing the law by 15 mph, and you are not the only one who is over the speed limit.

Now, notice what happens when the law enters. He comes through on the fast lane with his lights flashing. Your heart misses a beat. You no longer feel secure in the fact that other motorists are also speeding; you know that you are personally as guilty as the next guy, and you could be the one the law pulls over. Suddenly, your "mere" 15 mph transgression doesn't seem such a small thing after all. It seems to abound.

Look at the freeway of sin. The whole world naturally goes with the flow. Who hasn't had an

"affair" (or desired to) at some time or other? Who in today's society doesn't tell the occasional "white" lie now and then, or take something that belongs to someone else, even if it's just "white collar" crime? They know they are "over the limit," but their security is in the fact that so many others are just as guilty. It seems God has forgotten all about sin and the Ten Commandments - "He has said in his heart, 'God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see'" (*Ps. 10:11 NKJV*).

Now watch the Law enter with lights flashing. The sinner's heart is stopped. He lays his hand upon his mouth. He examines the speedometer of his conscience; suddenly it shows him the measure of his guilt in a new light, the light of the Law. His sense of security in the fact that there are multitudes doing the same thing becomes irrelevant, because he knows he is as guilty as



the next person. Sin not only becomes personal, it seems to "abound." His mere lust becomes adultery of the heart (*Matt. 5:27-28*); his white lie becomes false witness; his own way becomes rebellion; his hatred becomes murder (*1 John 3:15*); his "light" fingers make him a thief - "Moreover the Law entered, that the offence might abound..." (*Rom. 5:20*). Without the Law entering, sin is neither personal, nor is it severe - "For without the Law sin is dead - the sense of it is inactive and a lifeless thing" (*Rom. 7:8b, Amp. Bible*). It is the "Commandment" that shows sin in its true light, that it is "exceedingly sinful" (*Rom. 7:13*). Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the great "teacher of the Law," and therefore saw sin in its true colors.

The "offense" and the "foolishness" of the cross.

According to *Romans 3:20*, "...the real function of the Law is to make men recognize and be conscious of sin (not mere perception, but an acquaintance with sin which works towards repentance...)" (*Amp. Bible*).

To illustrate this, imagine if I said to you, "I have some good news for you! Someone has just paid a

\$25,000 speeding ticket on your behalf!" You would probably answer me with some cynicism in your tone, "What are you talking about? I don't have a \$25,000 speeding ticket!"

Your reaction would be quite understandable. If you don't know you have broken the law in the first place, the good news of someone paying a fine for you won't be good news; it will be foolishness to you.

My insinuation of unlawful activity will even be offensive to you.

But if I was to put it this way, it may make more sense: "Today the police clocked you traveling at 55 mph. in an area designated for a blind children's convention. You totally ignored ten clear warning signs saying that the maximum speed was 15 mph. What you did was extremely dangerous. The fine is \$25,000 or imprisonment. The law was about to apprehend you when someone stepped in and paid the fine for you. You are very fortunate."

Can you see that telling you the good news of the fine being paid, without telling you that you have broken the law first, will leave you thinking of the "good news" as nothing but nonsense? To make

known your transgression actually gives sense to the good news. An unclouded explanation of the law, so that you can clearly see your violation, helps you understand and also appreciate the good news.

In the same way, to tell someone the good news that Jesus died for their sins makes no sense to them, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing..." (*1 Cor. 1:18 NIV*).

If an unregenerate person is told that Jesus "paid the fine" for him (that He died for his sins), it is quite understandable for him to say, "What are you talking about? I don't have any 'sins.' I try to live a good life..." etc. Your insinuation that he is a sinner, when he doesn't think he is, will also be offensive to him.

But those who take the time to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, and open up the Ten Commandments, will see the sinners become "...convinced of the Law as transgressors" (*James 2:9*). Once a sinner sees his transgression, the good news will be neither offensive nor foolish, but the power of God to salvation.