

Desire's Grandchild

A Look into the Spiritual Development of Sin in the Life of a Christian
and the Point of No Return

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Introduction

“Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”(James 1:15, New International Version).

In the realm of physics, there exists a principle positing that all phenomena in the universe tend towards a state of entropy or disorder. A similar claim can be made about sin. The purpose of this paper, nonetheless, is not to offer clever methods that allow for the spiritualization of the laws of nature. Rather, this paper aims to elaborate on the consequent three claims:

1. The lethal effects of sin upon the heart
2. When enough sin is enough
3. Spiritual death

One point this article does not aim to elucidate, however, is whether a genuine Christian can indulge in sin to the point of spiritual death, or whether anyone indulging in deliberate sin is, in reality, a Christian. One answer this article does aspire to offer, nevertheless, is that a person can come to know the truth of God’s Word, accept this Truth, partake in the communion of the Holy Spirit, and yet, willingly turn their back on Jesus Christ.

The Lethal Effects of Sin Upon the Heart

The purpose of metaphors or anthropomorphism in the Bible is to capacitate the reader in understanding Spiritual principles.¹ By bringing an abstract aspect to the level of anatomy, God can convey to the reader the technicalities of the concept in a more comprehensible manner. This is the case for the Biblical concept of “the heart.” This human organ is used in several instances

¹ C. Owiredu, "Sin is a Person: Some Ontological Metaphors in the Bible," *Acta Theologica* 41, no. 1 (01, 2021): 87.

throughout the Scriptures to convey a message typically associated with the character of an individual. In copious passages, the heart anthropomorphism is employed to portray: the human spirit (Psa. 51: 10; Lk. 1:46-47), and the place where emotions (Deut. 6:5; Jn. 14:27), intentions (Gen 6:5; Mat 15:19; Heb 4:12), the will (Ps. 119:11), and the ability for worship reside² (Jn. 4:24). This is the same place where conscience also resides, or at least is so closely related to it that it has the potential to affect it (Rom. 2:15; Heb. 10:22; 1 Tim 1:15). Whichever the nature of such a place is, the Scriptures often refer to it as the core of the human being and the primary place to be regenerated or be made right with God upon repentance (Heb. 9:14; Act. 15:8-9; Eze. 36:26; Heb. 10:22; Mk. 5:8).

Given that the Word of God is Spirit (Jn. 6:63), it talks to the heart,³ the Spiritual dimension of a person (Heb. 4:12). Once the Word reaches a person's heart, that individual is made responsible for cultivating it (Jas. 1:21) or rejecting it (Act. 13:46).⁴ If that Word is cultivated it will grow and produce fruit (Mat. 13:23), but if it is rejected, matters will not look the same a second time the Word is heard. The heart will be less responsive to it creating a layer of indifference every time this process of hearing-and-rejecting is repeated. The Bible calls this process the "hardening of the heart." This process is quite analogous to the physical weathering of a surface. Often it is compared to a callous created on soft tissue (Isa 6:10). In the same manner a hand will develop dead skin (callouses) when it is exposed to constant friction, so will the heart grow cold and immune to the Spirit of God every time the Scriptures touch the heart and the hearer refuses its penetration. It will become a calloused organ, which after creating a layer of dead tissue, will lose its capacity to feel.

² Rober Saucy, *Minding the Heart : The Way of Spiritual Transformation*, (United States: Kregel Publications, 2013).

³ Saucy, *Minding the Heart : The Way of Spiritual Transformation*.

⁴ Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 271.

There is a specific instance in the Gospels known as the "Parable of the sower" that conceivably alludes to this idea (Mat 13:1-23).⁵ Jesus, himself, deciphers this parable for His disciples. He portrays the word of God as the seed to be planted and then He proceeds to paint four different kinds of soil. These are as follows: the road, the thorny ground, the rocky ground, and the good soil. They are meant to represent a person's heart.⁶ The parable alludes to the idea that the receptor is responsible for the care of their soil (the heart)⁷. Interestingly enough, however, there is one kind of individual who has turned his piece of real estate into a road. A place that the seed can no longer penetrate.

It is common knowledge that a road does not form on its own. In order for the weathering of it to happen, it has to encounter continual external pressure. Not to mention that a path is most times intentionally formed. The Individual with this kind of heart is not an individual who simply has not encountered an opportunity to cultivate a seed because one has not been given. This is someone who has had a wide array of opportunities and has refused to accept it. The Sower has walked upon many times throwing seed. And since it denies entrance to the seed, the heart only becomes harder every time the cycle is repeated.

This is the very danger a Christian must face when, after having come to know the light, he or she chooses to indulge in premeditated sin, trampling over the blood of Christ (Heb 10:29). Here is how the two types of sin may be best comprehended. There is a difference between going for a drive one Saturday afternoon and accidentally running over a pedestrian who violated a traffic signal versus watching that same pedestrian every Saturday for a month, making notes of

⁵ Ruth Ann Foster, and William D Shiell. "The Parable of the Sower and the Seed in Luke 8:1-10: Jesus' Parable of Parables." *Review & Expositor* 94, no. 2 (Spr 1997): 259-67.

⁶ From now on the term heart will be employed to depict the concept of someone's character, will, or spirit.

⁷ Foster, et al., "The Parable of the Sower and the Seed in Luke 8:1-10: Jesus' Parable of Parable," 263.

the exact place and time at which they like to take a walk, and then make an intentional decision of throwing one's vehicle over them. In the same way, there is also a harsh difference between a sin committed against someone's desire—due to humanity's sinful nature⁸ (Rom 7:15)—and those birthed from a deep heart's desire, as apostle James warns the reader (Jas 1:15). It is a frightening thought to live in sin when someone is in the dark, but there are no words to explain how frightening it is to live under sin once one has known the light (Heb 10:31; 2 Pet. 2:21).

An individual's attitude towards sin is one of the most fundamental differentiation factors between a genuine believer and a phony (1 Jn. 3:6). Nothing will harm and threaten the life of a Christian more than premeditated sin. This act is so dangerous because in order for it to take place several boundaries must be traversed. For example, knowledge of the word of God must be ignored, the conscience must be violated, and the precious Holy Spirit of God must be resisted. Premeditated sin is not an act that develops from one day to the next. James compares it to the process of pregnancy because it is something that must be incubated and nourished for a certain period of time before it takes birth. It can always be traced to a seed of corrupted desire; a seed that usually is the result of a deeper spiritual issue.⁹ A hardened heart, therefore is, the result of intentional, continuous acts of disobedience and resistance to the Spirit of God. Such a progression appears many times throughout the Scriptures. The claim that Pharaoh was acting against light is not one that will be made here, after all, he was not part of God's Holy people. However, the point that he resisted the call to repentance, is clear. It is said of him that after God gave him ample opportunity for repentance, God "hardened his heart"¹⁰ (Exo 10:1). This phrase, some scholars pose, is better translated as "God made his heart firm." In contemporaneous terms,

⁸ Stephen J. Duffy, 'Our Hearts of Darkness: Original Sin Revisited,' *Theological Studies*, 49, 1988, p.606.

⁹ Duffy, 'Our Hearts of Darkness: Original Sin Revisited,' 615.

¹⁰Jonathan Grossman, "The Structural Paradigm of the Ten Plagues Narrative and the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *Vetus Testamentum* 64, no. 4 (2014): 601, doi:10.1163/15685330-12341173.

this would be said "he got what he wanted." He wanted to do what seemed best to him, therefore God allowed it. It was he who chose his destination through his actions.

Very Similar, although more grievous was the case of Saul, who after refusing to accept his wrongs, and rejecting the word of God for long enough, it was him who came to be rejected by God (1 Sam. 15:23). Subsequently being abandoned by the Spirit of God (1 Sam. 16:14). It is the erroneous thinking of those who live under addiction to drugs, alcohol, or any other addictive behavior or substance, that they can recant from it at any time. The same is the case of those who have known the light and choose to toy around with sin. They fantasize about the thought that they can repent and be made right with God at any moment. But just how much truth there is in that? None! For repentance belongs to God alone (2 Tim 2:25; Jn. 6:44). Can the heart, thus, become so tarnished that it loses its spiritual life? This question will be explored in the next section.

When Enough Sin Is Enough

Can a Christian sin to a point of spiritual desensitization; a point where sin does not prick their conscience anymore? Can they find repentance again? Truly, that is a difficult question, for no one knows the mind of God (Rom. 11:34). Declaring to whom He must show mercy and to whom He must not, is beyond the ability or liberty of any human being (Rom. 9:15). Such an act is usurpation of His place. Neither must one generalize every case and claim that God acts under the same timeframe and in the same manner under all circumstances. Nonetheless, the goal of this section is to prove that there is enough Biblical evidence to support the claim that an invisible line in the path of unrepentant, intentional sin, exists. And that crossing this line begins the hardening of the individual's heart.¹¹ This line signals a divide between the intervening voice

¹¹ Edward P. Meadors, "Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart in Romans 1-2," *Proceedings* 21 (2001): 16.

of the Holy Spirit and His withdrawal from the person. Few have put this concept more eloquent than C. S. Lewis, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’”¹²

This, of course, does not mean that there is a point where God stops forgiving (1 Jn. 1: 9). It solely means that there is a point when the sinning party loses the wanting for repentance. By this point, the spirit of God has been belittled long enough that ultimately, He departs (Isa. 63:10; Psa. 51:11), ultimately marking the Spiritual death of the person. There are persuasive Biblical passages to stipulate that this is the sin of death that apostle John speaks about in his first letter to the church (1 Jn. 5:16). A person who claims to be a believer and yet, confidently and constantly indulges in sin, John recommends not to even bother praying for. But how can someone prove that John is truly talking about deliberate sin and not about a particular sinful act? The answer can be found by the execution of basic hermeneutical methods on the text, like looking at the immediate context and the author's reason for writing.

In Chapter Five, John opens by introducing the distinctive characteristics between those who have truly been born of God and those who have not. He mentions two main factors of differentiation in particular; one is the adherence to the most fundamental belief of the Christian dogma: the Divinity of Christ. The second one is the attitude towards God's commands (1 Jn. 5:1-5). In verse 4 of the same chapter, he states that only those who have been born of God can overcome the world, and in verses 6-18, he explains who are those who have been born of God, namely the ones who do not continue to sin deliberately (1 Jn. 5:18). Consequently, in verse 16, he exhorts the reader to pray for the brethren who have fallen in sin, a sin that does not lead to death. He also advises to not bother praying for those who have willingly chosen to remain in it,

¹² C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, (United States: HarperCollins, 2009), 41.

this is the sin of death. The reader can gain assurance that deliberate sin is the issue in mind by looking at verses 17 and 18. Verse 17 states that all wrongdoing is sin but there is a sin that does not lead to death, in James' words. This is a sin that has not yet birthed Desire's grandchild, death. In addition, in verse 18 he develops his argument by immediately talking about willful sin, which supports the idea that such a sin is the sin of death.

It is also worth mentioning that the nature of death the text has in scope is Spiritual death. Some who reject this idea assert that John is elaborating on physical death,¹³ but the argument is less convincing in light of the points already presented. The notion that John talks about physical death is irreconcilable with the context of the chapter and with the entirety of John's letter. As said before, the letter has in view two main points: to affirm the incarnation of Christ and to warn against sin. It is hard to see how the violation of any of those two points would bring about anyone's physical death. The world would not be nearly as close to the amount of people it hosts today if the denial of Christ was a cause of death. Consequently, the individuals whom John is referring to in Chapter 5 verse 16 happen to be those to whom the letter is addressed. They are the members of Christ's church (1 Jn. 2:1), not the children of the world. Certainly, no one who denies the incarnation of Christ can be called a brother or sister by a child of God, as John does in verse 16. The hindrances to the idea that he is talking about physical death only augment as one studies all the references in his letter. With the sole exception of Chapter 3 verse 16, all other mentions of the term discuss spiritual death.

In this way, John seems to indicate that there is indeed a line that can be crossed by sinning deliberately. One that marks the Spiritual death of the individual. John is not alone in the subject, however. The writer of Hebrews develops the same argument¹⁴ and this time with

¹³ John V. McGee, *Thru the Bible: 1 Corinthians - Revelation*, (United States: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 819.

¹⁴ Ronald K. Rittger, *Hebrews, James*, (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 82.

considerably stronger expressions than the beloved disciple does. From Chapter 5 verse 11 to Chapter 6 verse 8, the author warns about the danger of falling away. He is sure to clarify immediately, that those of whom he is speaking are those who have shared in God's Holy Spirit (heb. 6:4). The author uses more explicit arguments to confirm that it is impossible for someone who has stepped all over God's Son to be brought back into repentance a second time:¹⁵

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.” (Hebrews 6:4-6, English Standard Version)

This verse is not elaborating on someone who has fallen into the same mistake twice. The author is talking about a person who has been made alive by God once and has opted for death a second time. By stating that it is impossible to restore them “again,” the author is expressing that they had been restored a first time already.¹⁶ Although deliberate sin is not specifically broached in this passage as being the cause of a second spiritual death, the notion is developed in Chapter 10 of the book. Particularly in verses 26-29 where it states:

“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of

¹⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrew*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 180.

¹⁶ Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrew*, 324.

fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:26-29, ESV)

It is important to mention again that the author is not accusing God of being unwilling to forgive. He is stating that the sinning party is not willing to repent.¹⁷ Deliberate sin means fighting against God’s Spirit and willingly rebelling against that which the person knows to be right and true, therefore there is no hope of ever being made right with God again. The only thing left is a terrible expectation of fire.¹⁸ Peter compares this action to a dog returning to its own vomit and a swan returning to the mud. He further adverts that such individuals would have experienced more favorable circumstances had they never come to know the path of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:20-22). They have known the path of righteousness and the path of wickedness and have selected the latter. Hence, God has answered the desire of their hearts by allowing them to give themselves into that which their heart desires (Rom. 1:24-25).¹⁹

A similar state was reached by ancient Israel.²⁰ Ancient Israel gave itself to a state of constant rebellion against the Word of God that ultimately God allowed them to have what they

¹⁷ Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrew*, 180.

¹⁸ Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrew*, 324.

¹⁹ Aaron Sherwood, *The Word of God Has Not Failed : Paul’s Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9*, (United States: Lexham Press, 2015).

²⁰ Although in the case of Israel a restoration is expected. It is important to mention I am not claiming nor do I believe Israel has been replaced by the Church. The Bible is quite explicit about Israel’s redemption; Sherwood, *The Word of God Has Not Failed : Paul’s Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9*.

so much wanted, blind eyes and deaf ears (Jn. 12:40; Mk. 4:12).²¹ Jesus states in John 12:40 and Mark 4:12 that indeed, God will forgive them if they turn, the problem is they cannot. At least until the time of their redemption comes. It is clear then that God will always forgive a contrite heart (Psa. 51:17). Always! The action in question is not whether God can forgive, but whether the person can repent, however. Jesus affirms that a person can indeed reach a place where returning is not an option. For timely reasons, the following claim will not be expanded on, but there is enough evidence to propose that the unforgivable sin presented by Matthew, Mark, and Luke is the same. It is a sin against the Holy Spirit (Mat. 12:31; Mk. 3:28-29; Lk. 12:10).²²

The answer to the question posed in this section, therefore, is yes. A person can allow sin to mature and yield death, closing the door to the road back to repentance. Alas! And to think death's birth could have been avoided had its grandfather, desire, been halted on time.

The birth of spiritual death

As stated in the title of this paper, spiritual death is not a phenomenon that exhibits its ugly head from one day to the other. It is the process of serious, intentional actions that violate the Word of God, belittle His Holy Spirit, and gradually desensitize the conscience and Spiritual discernment of an individual.²³ An act of sin is not a mere act, is a thought brought into execution. Even when sin is the product of a rushed impulse, it signals a deeper problem. Actions simply voice the true character of a person.²⁴ That is not to say that every act of sin is intentional or that every impulse acted upon is the desired behavior by the person executing the act. There

²¹ Meadors, "Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart in Romans 1-2," 19.

²² Rittger, *Hebrews, James*, 83.

²³ Meadors, "Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart in Romans 1-2," 22.

²⁴ Stuart Lasine, *Weighing Hearts : Character, Judgment, and the Ethics of Reading the Bible*, (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2012), 3.

are certain differences between acting upon an impulse and acting with intentionality (Rom. 7:14-23).

Actions are thoughts and desires that have been acted upon. This is the reason for which Christ took the law to a higher level than mere actions. When He states "You have heard...but I tell you" (Mat. 5:21-48) He is presenting that God is concerned with the intentions behind the action rather than the actions themselves (Mat. 23:25-26). In this famous, rhetorical template, the Lord takes an action prohibited by the Law and unwraps it before His disciples to show them that what produces the action is the desire within a person. In this way, He establishes the thoughts and desires of the heart as the new standard of obedience.

When a Christian surrenders to the ugly monster of malignant thinking, the question is not whether they can keep the fantasy in their mind, but rather for how long. Sooner or later desire will generate sin if the pregnancy is not aborted. Once sin has been developed, the person is one step closer to the third stage, death. By this time in the process, the person is like a frog slowly burning in boiling water without noticing. Yet, they retain the thought that repentance is always an option. A state of mind that voices, "I can sin today but repent tomorrow." Ignoring the very fact that their lack of interest for immediate repentance is a series of contractions pointing to the last stage in the process of sin, namely death.

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