



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SIN?

—by Peter Hammond

The word 'sin' is rarely used in any serious context today. Modern vocabulary and post-modern ethics have changed its meaning dramatically.

In 1973, psychiatrist Carl Menninger, wrote a landmark book 'Whatever Became of Sin?' noting that even the word sin seems to have disappeared from common vernacular, possibly because many people don't even believe in the concept of sin.

God hates sin

The Bible makes clear that God hates sin. "These...things the Lord hates...an abomination to Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in run-

ning to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren." Prov 6:16-19. than 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God!'. The doctrines of sin, redemption and repentance are out of fashion; instead the modern therapeutic language of self-esteem, self-actualisation and self-love are in. The emphasis in the average church is no longer about what 'God requires of me', but rather what 'God can do for me'.

Redefining sin

The word 'sin' is rarely used in any serious context today, it is often just a topic of jest. Modern vocabulary and post-modern eth-

today are more likely to call 'an alternative lifestyle!' Sins against God are now seen as 'moral failures', or 'mistakes' that keep us from realising our 'own individual potential and expectations'.

The goodness of man popularised

The historic Christian doctrines of original sin and actual sin which look at our nature, who we are, and our actions, what we do, have been replaced with the concept of the innate goodness of man and the fact that 'we are victims of circumstances'.

One of the most frustrating aspects of undertaking evangelism these days, is that most people seem to have no idea of sin. They know how to sin well enough, but they have no idea of what actually constitutes sin. The very concept of personal responsibility is even questioned.

The Two World Wars left many negating the worth of traditional values. The communist revolutions rejected private ownership of property. The sexual revolution rejected the Biblical principle of marriage itself.

Violating God's commandments

What is sin? The Bible defines sin as "lawlessness" 1 John 3:4. Every one of God's Ten Commandments are under relentless and systematic attack in the secular humanist media. Much of Hollywood, most universities and almost all the news media attack our Creator God, exalt idolatry, promote political idols, musicians and film stars. Blasphemy is

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The Great Evangelical Awakening was sparked by Jonathan Edwards' sermon: 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'. For most of Church history, preachers have spoken from the pulpits against the seven deadly sins of lust, gluttony, greed, laziness, anger, envy and pride. Today, few people would be able to even identify the seven deadly sins.

Today it may be more likely that one might hear a sermon on 'God in the Hands of Angry Sinners',

ics have changed dramatically. Drunkenness is now described as 'chemical dependency'. Gossip is frequently referred to as 'sharing'.

Pride has become 'a superiority complex', or 'an inflated ego'. Corporate executives no longer steal, they commit 'fraud'. People are no longer said to be living in sin, but 'living together'. Fornication has become 'free love'. They are no longer adulterers; they are having an 'affair'.

Perverts are described as preferring 'an alternative lifestyle'. What God calls sin, man now often calls 'sickness'. What the Bible describes as evil, has now been redefined as 'error'. What God calls an abomination, men



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promoted as entertainment. Honouring the Sabbath is overrun by rampant consumerism. The sanctity of life is undermined by the promotion of abortion and euthanasia. A culture of death

Marketing selfishness

Many pastors feel that they are competing in a 'buyers market' and that they cannot afford to alienate potential parishioners. At church conferences, pastors are warned that people do not want to hear that they should cultivate humility, self-discipline and virtue. Or that they need to listen to their conscience and repent of their sins. As a result, a religious culture is promoted that defines God in purely selfish terms.

Churches are encouraged to accept people for exactly who they are, without making any moral demands on them. Churches must console, but not judge. The pleasure of worship has been replaced with the worship of pleasure. The Apostle Paul warned that such a time would come: “For

is celebrated in many blood-splattered horror films. The sanctity of love and marriage is undermined at every turn. There is a relentless war against truth itself, and with every one of the Ten Commandments under such ceaseless attack, it is no wonder that the very concept of sin is being questioned.

Contemporary culture is celebrating what was once condemned. Pride is now lifted up as 'self-esteem.' Envy is the engine of tabloid culture. Lust is an advertising strategy.

the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” 2 Tim 4:3-4

Shaping God in our own minds

I recently heard a number of testimonies where individuals claimed that God spoke to them and told them: “I love you just the way you are. You don't need to change a thing!” That is clearly not the God of the Bible.

It is self-deception to assume that the Creator of the universe, the Eternal Judge,

our Holy God, has no higher standards than we have, and does not call us to repent, to renew our minds, and to be transformed in our attitudes and actions.

People who claim that God spoke to them and told them they don't need to change, are guilty of having created a false god, an idol. It is blasphemous to claim that God has spoken to us when we are plainly listening either to our own feelings, or to a world in rebellion to God.

“It's all about me!”

Many churches seem to have become therapeutic, pragmatic and utilitarian, even narcissistic. They preach an 'all about me' gospel. In the early 1980s there was a prominent news report in the Sunday Times concerning the

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Miss South Africa of that time. She said that she was a 'born-again Christian' who liked her church because “they don't teach any doctrine” and they did not condemn her for living with her boyfriend!

“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” Prov 28:13. The Bible emphasises the depravity of man. We are sinful and personally responsible for our actions and attitudes. However, modern, antinomian and egalitarian society emphasises the goodness of man. The entertainment industry has so popularised and justified lust, pride and greed in attractive heroes and heroines that many have

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come to accept what they would have previously condemned.

Compounding the problem, most religious messages pass over the uncomfortable realities of sin and focus on 'feel good' themes. As a result, conviction of sin is rare. Religious leaders who excuse sin, deny its existence and tickle the ears of their hearers by telling them what they want to hear, instead of what the Bible proclaims, are actually doing their people a grave disservice.

The heart of the Gospel

The holiness of God, the Law of God, the sinfulness of man, the sacrifice of Christ and the need for repentance and faith are central to the Gospel. A sick man cannot prove that he has no fever by breaking the thermometer! Similarly, rejecting the Law of God and ignoring so much of what the Bible says on the subject of sin will not solve the problem.

A Biblical picture of sin is leprosy which destroys the nervous system and disfigures the body. It is ugly and loathsome. The Bible is clear “The wages of sin is death...” Romans 6:23. Sin withers the soul, hardens the heart and darkens the mind.

If sin is not serious, then why did Jesus Christ have to come to this earth and suffer such a horrendous death on the Cross of Calvary? The Doctrine of sin may not be a popular message, but it is vitally important. It is worth noticing that the middle letter of sin is 'l'. The middle letter of lie is also 'l', as is the middle letter of pride. Selfishness is at the heart of our problem. We are our own worst enemy.

Missing the mark

The Bible defines sin as missing the mark.

Violating the Law of God. Augustine defined sin as every work, word or wish contrary to the Law of God. Sin is not only the bad things we do, but the good things we fail to do. “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to Him it is sin.” James 4:17.

The environmental destruction caused by three months of crude oil gushing out of the depths of the sea shocked and horrified millions worldwide. This is a picture of the disruption, degradation, and destruction caused by sin gushing out from the hearts of rebellious men and women. The reality of sin should cause us to turn to God and kneel at the Cross of Calvary. We dare not live in denial and tolerate sin.

Over a century ago General William

Jesus came to earth the first time as the Lamb of God to save us from our sins. He will come again as the Lion of Judah to judge.

Booth, of the Salvation Army, warned that a time may come when churches will preach a Saviour without a Cross, salvation without repentance, Heaven without hell and Christianity without holiness. Clearly we see that time has come.

Judgement awaits us all

God will judge each one of us. An eternal hell awaits the unrepentant. A glorious Heaven is promised to all who truly repent of their sins, trust Christ alone for salvation and follow the Word of God in obedience.

The heart of the Gospel is a changed life in Christ. But each one of us must make a choice.

You must choose to trust and obey Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ began His public ministry with these words: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Matt 4:17.

The Lamb and the Lion

The first time Jesus came to this earth as a Saviour, the Lamb of God who takes away the

sins of the world. All who turn in repentance away from sin and trust in Christ, following Him in obedience are saved. But our Lord Jesus Christ will come again...this time as a Judge: The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Either you surrender to Christ as your Saviour now, or you will face Him as your Judge. ■

DR PETER HAMMOND is an author and speaker. This article is part of an audio series. To order call 021 689 4480 or www.christianlibertybooks.org.za