

SIN – HOW DO WE ESCAPE?
Psalms 39:8, Hebrews 2:3, Romans 7:15-8:1
By Raymond White

Once we understand that sin causes death (**Romans 6:23**), we should then want to know how to escape it. It helps to consider that there are two kinds of sin: those we know about and those we don't

Psalms 19:12 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.

In other words, it's not just those sins that I know about that I want to escape, but also those that I don't know about.

The idea is disheartening. My conspicuous sins, those which I know about and struggle with daily, have convinced me that my problems run deeper, that I am a habitual sinner who sins so naturally that I don't even sense them when they happen: an instant response of anger, a thoughtless word that insults (*faux pas*) without me knowing it, and other things that I don't imagine or don't admit to or don't know that something is a sin.

Assuming that I can deal with those sins that I know about (which is doubtful), how do I deal with those that I don't know about? What we need is a blanket deliverance.

Psalms 39:8 Deliver me from all my transgressions...

The author recognizes that he is powerless to escape from his own sinful nature, his passions, his lusts. And he very much *wants* to escape, but since the problem is beyond him, he turns to God, "God, *you* have to take this on for me."

I think that "deliver me from sin" is asking God to do four things:

1. "Forgive me" in the straight forward sense — to forgive a debt or acquit a crime. We call this justification. I'm asking God to declare me just, and to let me walk away from this mess I've created without penalty and without condemnation.
2. "Stop my sinful behavior"; that is, the things that I do. It's not enough to be judged righteous, I want to *be* righteous. We call this sanctification, a plea for holiness, saintliness, or literally apart-ness; that is, apart from bad things that I come in contact with. **2 Corinthians 6:17** *Touch not the unclean thing.*
3. "Change my sinful nature". This is not what I do but what I am. We call this purification, and it is internal, in the heart. **Matthew 5:8** *Blessed are the pure in heart.* **Matthew 12:34** *Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.*
4. "Undo the damage". It's less about me and more about the people that I have injured. Help me undo the injury, to un-hurt them, to undo the consequences of my sin. And if there is no way I can do that, then, God, somehow do it for me, for them. I've tried but I can't, it's beyond me. So, God, I'm asking you to heal them for their sake — and mine, but mostly theirs.

So those are the goals, the objectives of the person who wants to not be a sinner. But having a clear objective is not enough. You can't just say, "I'll be a better person," — (well, you can say it, but it doesn't mean it will happen) — you must find a way to make it happen. The problem is that the flaws are built into our nature.

Paul says it like this.

***Romans 7:15** For that which I do I allow not: for that I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that I do. **:17** Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. **:18** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. **:19** For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. **:20** Now if I do that which I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. **:21** I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. **:22** For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. **:23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law in my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*

That pretty much sums it up. I know what is right, but the sin in me screams at me so loudly that I find myself yielding to its beck and call against my own will. It's as though I have two wills competing for my decision, a sort of cognitive dissonance, but it's not quite that either. Cognitive dissonance is two opinions in conflict, this is worse, two wills in conflict. Opinions we can talk ourselves out of, wills are our core being.

Paul's argument sounds like a cop-out. "The devil made me do it" logic transfers the blame for our misbehavior onto someone else (the devil) thus excusing ourselves. And that would be disingenuous except that, besides the fact that it's true, Paul is not excusing himself, he is, instead, condemning himself. Why? Because that's the only way he can get that the root cause of his sin. The roots are deep, and his motive is not excuse but escape! So his analysis is fair enough.

So, how does Paul propose we escape this cosmic conspiracy that targets us? Paul offers one way, and he continues —

***Romans 7:24** O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? **:25** I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. **8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

Paul asks the question directly: how can I possibly escape this trap? And he answers it just as directly — two things: (1) be "in Christ" and (2) walk holy.

What does "in Christ" mean? It means that in Christ is where we find forgiveness, and sanctification, and the rest. Without his atonement, anything else we might do would be useless.

What does "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" mean? Mainly it means that a holy *walk* is not a holy *arrival*. Paul knows and accepts that it is a journey, and

journeys are fraught with missteps and misdirection. But still the walk is a convergence to where we are trying to get to, like a planet in orbit either spiraling *in* towards its sun or *out* towards empty space. A holy walk is spiraling in towards God.

Why is that important, the distinction between a walk and an arrival? Because if Jesus insisted that we suddenly become sinless right now, it would all be hopeless. But Jesus is tolerant and patient, and he accepts from us our holy walk, if it truly is a holy walk taking us sincerely to where he wants us to be, and not just pretense.

Final thought.

Hebrew 2:3 How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ... ?

How, indeed. Truth is, there is no other escape. There is one only. Life is like being trapped in a burning building. You look around and see a door, one door only, and it says "Fire Exit". You know at that moment that that door is the only route to safety. Whether you live or die depends on you reaching and passing through that door.

Well, God has offered you a fire exit. Just go through it, that's all.