

NOBODY IS ENTIRELY FREE FROM SIN

Official Catholic doctrine teaches, “It is not a question of the man doing Penance being one who says, ‘Well, Lord, I think I’ve lived today pretty perfectly. I prayed generously and faithfully. I’ve loved my neighbour more than adequately – no failure there. I honestly don’t think I’ve failed you at all. So really, for a man who loves you as well as I do, there’s nothing more except some work of supererogation: so I’ll do this bit of Penance’. No, the man who does Penance is one who says, ‘Lord, the end of another messed-up day. I let you down at every turn. I’ve lived for myself all through. You’re not giving me the basic graces I need. Lord, please...I’m serious: so I’ll do this” (page 4, Friday Penance, John C Edwards SJ).

Matthew 12:34 has Jesus telling us that if you have any unrepentance in you any good you do is telling God that you only care about good when it suits you not that it is good. “How can you being EVIL speak GOOD things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A GOOD man out of the GOOD treasure of the heart bringeth forth GOOD things, and an EVIL man out of the EVIL treasure bringeth forth EVIL things”.

The First Epistle of John claims that anybody who says he has no sin is a liar and the truth of God is not in him at all. It does not say it just means people who think they have never sinned or people who think they do not sin any more but used to. So clearly it means both. This tells us that nobody alive is completely free from sin. They always have some sin in them. If all sin will be punished with eternal damnation then there is no hope except by somebody like Jesus keeping the law of God for us in our place.

Romans 3 teaches that all are sinful and nobody is an exception. It speaks in the present tense. It says that the reason nobody could be saved by obeying the Law of Moses was because nobody can keep it right despite it making provisions for forgiveness from God. That means we are all sinners and never have a clean moment.

In Isaiah 64:6, the prophet says that we and all our right ways are filthy rags before God. He says we so he included himself too. And he would have lived like a holy man and he claimed to be totally evil.

Jeremiah 13:23 says that a leopard cannot change its spots or an Ethiopian his skin just like the evil cannot do good. Isn’t that a nice piece of cynicism from the God of the Jews and the Christians? Jeremiah is saying they would pretend to be good but are not.

As St Augustine observed in Book 21, Chapter 27, of his City of God, Jesus in Matthew 6 gave out the Lord’s Prayer and immediately after stressed that you cannot be forgiven your sins unless you forgive first and indicated that it should be said as much as possible for it was the best prayer that he was hinting that all of us are continually in sin.

The doctrine that we are never completely pure is a logical consequence of the doctrine of Moses and Jesus that we must love God totally and with all our hearts meaning we serve ourselves and others the way God commands so that it is really God who is being served. We could never manage that in all things.

The black and white attitude which lies behind the Bible’s attempt to convict everybody of sin is dangerous. Many of the supposedly good and evil things we do are really neutral – as bad as they are good or neither if you like. If consequences have any bearing on morality or right and wrong at all then you have to believe that there are actions which are neutral.

WORKS CONSULTED

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BIBLE VERSION USED

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