

Killing sin (I)

The instruction is clear. We are to deal decisively with sin. So says Paul to the Christians in the Greek city of Colosse. "Put to death," he says "what is earthly in you." By earthly he means such things as "sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness... Idolatry" (see *Colossians 3.5*). He says something similar to the members of the church in Rome: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (*Romans 8.13*).

Duty

The verbs used differ but the apostle's intention is the same. Paul seeks to impress upon the followers of Jesus Christ their duty. They are not to ignore sin. Nor are they to let sin hold sway. It is to be put to death. This is not the only thing Christians are to do. But they are to grasp loving God entails killing off sin. It must not be allowed to flourish.

Define

If we are to heed this instruction we need to understand what sin is. Frequently it is defined in terms of wrong deeds - for example, sexual immorality or idolatry. It is not difficult to see why. In the verses of Scripture cited above the apostle refers to specific deeds. However we should also note the words of another apostle. John calls sin 'lawlessness' (*1 John 3.4*). In other words it is a rejection of God's law.

Defiance

We live in a moral universe. That does not mean everything in it is morally right. Rather the term refers to the fact that the cosmos was created by God. He is perfect: He is perfect in power, love and righteousness. However the perfect order created by the perfect God has been marred by sin. The devil, a fallen angel, rebelled against God. He defied his law and will. He remains in that state of defiance. Tragically he is not alone.

Mankind is also sinful by nature. The inclination of our heart is to get our own way. Instead of submitting

willingly to God's law we seek to get things to work to our advantage. This self-centred selfish trait is to be found in all people. The precise way in which expresses itself may differ according to circumstances and temperament. Yet it is there. Our awareness of it may fluctuate. We may even try to suppress it. But it is there. That is why David says: "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (*Psalms 51.5*).

Disastrous

The evidence for the existence of this evil principle sin is to be seen all around us. Primarily we see it in our own life but also in the lives of others. We may put it this way: sin leads to sins.

God made us for himself. We were not created to indulge ourselves but to serve him. Our pleasure ought to be in loving God. It should be by showing our love for him by doing his will. We know his will for us. Within ourselves we have an awareness of his existence and of our accountability to him. We also have the Ten Words (commandments) he gave to mankind. Yet we still defy him. Our defiance is seen in the way we break God's commands. Such defiance has disastrous consequences.

For example, a person who commits sexual sin defiles himself and those with whom the sin is shared. The latter may be willing (as in adultery or fornication) or unwilling partners (as in rape). Yet both are defiled. The sin affects all involved. Lives are violated and the perpetrator of the deed stands guilty before God of having defied his will. Furthermore, those who learn of the sin are affected as well. At the least they are made aware and reminded we live in an imperfect world. A world marred by sin.

Sins committed are evidence of sin - the evil principle - at work among and within us. Our responsibility is to put to death the evil deeds of the body. If we are to do that we need to appreciate the seriousness and severity of the problem we face. We also need to know the enormity of the task before us.