

Andrew Murray:

To understand grace, to understand Christ aright, we must understand what sin is. And how otherwise can we come to this understanding than through the light of God and his word?

Come with me to the beginning of the Bible. See there man created by God, after his image, and pronounced by his creator to be very good. Then sin entered, as rebellion against God. Adam was driven out of paradise and was brought along with the untold millions of following generations under curse and ruin. That was the work of sin. Here we learn its nature and power.

Come further on and see the ark of Noah on Ararat. So terrible had godlessness become among men, God saw nothing for it but to destroy man from off the earth. That was the work of sin.

Come once more with me to Sinai. God wished to establish his covenant with a new nation - with the people of Israel. But because of man's sinfulness, he could do this only by appearing in darkness and lightning so terrible that Moses said: 'I exceedingly fear and quake' (Heb. 12.2 1). And before the end of the giving of the law that awful message came: 'Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them' (Gal. 3. 10). It was sin which made that necessary.

Come once more with me, and this time to Calvary There see what sin is, and the hatred and enmity with which the world cast out and crucified the Son of God. There sin reached its climax. There Christ was, by God himself, made sin, and became a curse, as the only way to destroy sin. In the agony in which he prayed in Gethsemane, that he might not drink the terrible cup, and in the agony in which on the cross, in the deep darkness of desertion, he cried out: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' we obtain at least some faint idea of the curse and indescribable suffering which sin brings. If anything can make us hate and detest sin, it is Christ on the cross.

Come once again with me to the judgment seat of the Great Day, and see the bottomless pit of darkness wherein countless souls will be plunged under the sentence: 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire' (Matt. 25.41). Oh, will not these words soften our hearts and fill us with a never-to-be-forgotten horror of sin, so that we may hate it with a perfect hatred?

And now is there anything else that can help us to understand what sin is? Yes, there is. Turn your eyes inward, and behold your own heart, and see sin there. Remember that all you have already seen of the hateful and godlessness of sin should teach you what sin in your own heart means - all the enmity against God, all the ruin of men, all of its inner nature of hatefulness, lie hidden in the sin you have committed, guilt of every transgression against God. And when you remember that you are a child of God, and yet commit sin and allow it sometimes to fulfill its lusts, is it not fitting that you should cry out with shame: 'Woe is me, because of my sin?' 'Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord' (Luke 5:8).

One great power of sin is that it blinds men so that they do not recognise its true character. Even the Christian himself finds an excuse in the thought that he can never be perfect and that daily sin is a necessity. He is so accustomed to the thought of sinning that he has almost lost the power and ability of mourning over sin. And yet there can be no real progress in grace apart from an increased consciousness of the sin and guilt of every transgression against God. And there cannot be a more important question than this: 'How can I regain the lost tenderness of conscience and become prepared really to offer to God the sacrifice of a broken heart?'

Scripture teaches us the way. Let the Christian remember what God thinks about sin - the hatred with which his holiness bums against it, the solemn sacrifice which he made to conquer sin, and deliver us from it. Let him tarry in God's presence till his holiness shines upon him, and he cries out with Isaiah: 'Woe is me! for I am undone' (Isa. 6.5).

Let him remember the cross, and what the love of Christ had to endure there, through the unspeakable pain which sin caused him; and let him ask if this will not teach him to hearken to the voice which says: 'Oh, do not this abominable thing which I hate' (Jer. 44.4). Let him take time, so that the blood and love of the cross may exercise their full influence on him, and let him think of sin as nothing less than giving his hand to Satan and to his power. Is not this a terrible result of our prayerlessness, and of our short and hasty tarrying before God - that the true knowledge of sin is almost lost?

Let the believer think not only of what redemption has cost Christ, but also of the fact that Christ is offered to

him, by the Holy Spirit, as a gift of inconceivable grace, through whom divine forgiveness and purification and renewing have taken possession of him; and let him ask himself with what return such love should be repaid. If only time were taken to tarry in God's presence and ask such questions, the Spirit of God would accomplish his work of conviction of sin in us and would teach us to take an entirely new standpoint, and would give us a new view of sin. The thought would begin to arise in our hearts that we have in very deed been redeemed, so that in the power of Christ we may live every day as partners in the great victory which Christ obtained over sin on the cross, and manifest it in our walk.

What think you? Do you not begin to see that the sin of prayerlessness has had a more terrible effect than you at first supposed? It is because of this hasty and superficial converse with God that the sense of sin is so weak and that no motives have power to help you to hate and flee from sin as you ought. Nothing, nothing except the hidden, humble, constant fellowship with God can teach you, as a child of God, to hate sin as God wants you to hate it. Nothing, nothing but the constant nearness and unceasing power of the living Christ can make it possible for you rightly to understand what sin is and to detest it. And without this deeper understanding of sin, there will be no thought of appropriating the victory which is made possible for you in Christ Jesus, and will be wrought in you by the Spirit.

O my God, cause me to know my sin and teaching me to tarry before thee and to wait on thee till thy Spirit causes something of thy holiness to rest upon me! O my God, cause me to know my sin, and let this drive me to listen to the promise: 'He that abideth in him sinneth not,' and to expect the fulfillment from Thee!

The Holiness of God

It has often been said that the conception of sin and of the holiness of God has been lost in the Church. In the inner chamber we have the place where we may learn again how to give God's holiness the position it should have in our faith and life. If you do not know how to spend half an hour in prayer, take up the subject of God's holiness. Bow before him. Give yourself time, and give God also time, that he and you may come into touch with one another. It is a great work, but one fraught with great blessing.

If you wish to strengthen yourself in the practice of this holy presence, take up the holy word. Take, for instance, the book of Leviticus and notice how God seven times gives the command: 'Ye shall be holy, for I am holy' (11.44, 45; 19.2; 20.7, 26; 21.8; 22.32). Still more frequent is the expression: 'I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.' This great thought is taken over into the New Testament. Peter says (1 Pet. 1. 15, 16): 'Be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.' Paul writes in his first epistle (1 Thess. 3.13; 4.7; 5.24): 'he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness.... God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness... Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.'

Nothing but the knowledge of God, as the holy one, will make us holy. And how are we to obtain that knowledge of God, save in the inner chamber? It is a thing utterly impossible unless we take time and allow the holiness of God to shine on us. How can any man on earth obtain intimate knowledge of another man of remarkable wisdom, if he does not associate with him, and place himself under his influence? And how can God himself sanctify us, if we do not take time to be brought under the power of the glory of his holiness? Nowhere can we get to know the holiness of God, and come under its influence and power, save in the inner chamber. It has been well said: 'No man can expect to make progress in holiness who is not often and long alone with God.'

And what now is this holiness of God? It is the highest and most glorious and most all-embracing of all the attributes of God. Holiness is the most profound word in the Bible. It is a word that is at home in heaven. Both the Old and New Testaments tell us this. Isaiah heard the seraphs with veiled faces cry out: 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts' (6.3). John heard the four living creatures say: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty' (Rev. 4. 8). This is the highest expression of God's glory in heaven, by beings who live in his immediate presence and bow low before him. And dare we imagine that we, by thinking, and reading, and bearing, can understand or become partakers of the holiness of God? What folly! Oh, that we might begin to thank God that we have a place in the inner chamber, a place where we can be alone with him, and take time for the prayer: 'Let thy holiness, O Lord, shine more and more into our hearts, that they may become holy.'

And let our hearts be deeply ashamed of our prayerlessness, through which we have made it impossible for God to impart his holiness to us. Let us beseech God fervently to forgive us this sin, and to allure us by his heavenly grace, and to strengthen us to have fellowship with him, the holy God.

I have said that the meaning of the words, 'The holiness of God', is not easily expressed. But we may begin by saying that they imply the unspeakable aversion and hatred with which God regards sin. And if you wish to

understand what that means, remember that he preferred to see his Son die, rather than that sin should reign. Think of the Son of God, who gave up his life rather than act in the least matter against the will of the Father. Still further, he had such a hatred of sin that he preferred to die rather than that men should be held in its power. That is something of the holiness of God, which is a pledge that he will do everything for us - for you and me - to deliver us from sin. Holiness is the fire of God that will consume sin in us and make us holy sacrifices, pure and acceptable before him. It was for this reason that the Spirit came down as fire. He is the Spirit of God's holiness, the Spirit of sanctification in us.

Oh, think over the holiness of God, and bow in lowliness before him, till your heart is filled with the assurance of what the holy one will do for you. Take a week, if necessary, to read and re-read the words of God on this great truth, till your heart is brought under the conviction: 'This is the glory of the inner chamber, to converse with God the holy one; to bow down in deep humility and shame before him, because we have so despised him and his love through our prayerlessness.' There we shall receive the assurance that he will again take us into-fellowship with himself. No one can expect to understand and receive the holiness of God who is not often and long alone with God.

Someone has said that the holiness of God is the expression of the unspeakable distance by which he in his righteousness is separated from us, and yet also of the unspeakable nearness in which he in his love longs to hold fellowship with us and dwell in us. Bow in humble reverence, as you think of the immeasurable distance between you and God. Bow in childlike confidence in the unspeakable desire of his love to be united with you in the deepest intimacy; and reckon most confidently on him to reveal something of his holiness to the soul which thirst after him and waits upon him and is quiet before him.

Notice how the two sides of the holiness of God are united in the cross. So terrible was the aversion and anger of God against our sin that Christ was left in the thick darkness, because God, when sin was laid upon him, had to hide his face from him. And yet so deep was the love of God toward us and he so desired to be united to us that he spared not his Son but gave him over to unutterable sufferings, that so he might receive us, in union with Christ, into his holiness, and press us to his heart as his beloved children. It was of this suffering that our Lord Jesus said: 'I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth' (John 17.19). Thus he is become of God our sanctification, and we are holy in him.

I beseech you, think not little of the grace that you have a holy God who longs to make you holy. Think not little of the voice of God which calls you to give time to him in the stillness of the inner chamber, so that he may cause his holiness to rest on you. Let it be your business every day, in the secrecy of the inner chamber, to meet the holy God. You will be repaid for the trouble it may cost you. The reward will be sure and rich. You will learn to hate sin, and to regard it as accursed and conquered. 'The new nature will give you a horror of sin. The living Jesus, the holy God, will, as conqueror, be your power and strength; and you will begin to believe the great promise contained in 1 Thessalonians 5.23, 24: 'The very God of peace sanctify you wholly... Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.'