

## **“God Seeks to... Save All People From Aimlessness & Sin”**

**Proverbs 3:21-35 Romans 7:14-25**

**Scott B. Martin - July 12-,2009**

I once heard of a woman who was an outright atheist or an agnostic at best. When questioned about how she could live without God and God’s forgiveness of simply said, “I never sin.” Now I trust that was a overstatement brought on by defensiveness. If it wasn’t I would say that was a sin hubris right there.

Perhaps the woman was trying to say that she didn’t feel the need for God to forgive her. Perhaps she felt she had other means of dealing with her sins. Otherwise, her comment shows startling lack of insight into her own character and into the very nature of what it means to be a human being in this world.

Perhaps she felt she never committed any of the obvious sins, like those listed in the Ten Commandments: adultery, covetousness, failure to honor one’s parents, murder, etc. She may even have been basically right about this. She may never have physically committed adultery, although Jesus tells us that one can also commit adultery in one’s heart. I have little doubt that she never murdered anyone. Thankfully few of us have, but Jesus tells us that even if we wished someone dead we are committing murder. Clearly Jesus’ view of sin was far broader than what many of us have.

It is very easy to have an overly optimistic assessment of our character. Many people consider themselves to be basically “good people” and maybe they are, but if the Bible is clear on anything it is that even “good people” are subject to sin. What complicates our

views on sin is that we just tend to think of all the really big sins like those I mentioned earlier. We tend to overlook the thousands of smaller sins we commit every day, like gossip, uncharitable thoughts, or simply turning away from God.

The Catholics have long had a much wider view of sin. They talk about sins of commission, things we do that are against God's will and sins of omission, things we should have done to help our neighbor and serve God. I rather suspect that my sins of omission are at least as great, if not greater, than my sins of commission.

Such a view of sin goes right back to Jesus who seemed to regularly forgive even the biggest sins people committed, especially when the sinner was about to be shunned or even stoned by those who considered themselves among the righteous. In fact we find Jesus' harshest words directed at those who considered themselves righteous, but whom Jesus felt were "far from the kingdom of God." So it is that Jesus tells them that may not have physically committed adultery, but they have in their hearts, that they may not have murdered anyone but they have wished people dead, that they have ignored the needs of the widow, the orphans and the needy.

Paul seems to have struggled mightily and openly with all kinds of sins. Here we have one of the greatest believers of all time candidly proclaiming, "**I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.**" (Romans 7:5) Paul is demonstrating amazing self awareness here and he is not afraid to share his struggles with sin with his fellow believers. He does so, of course, hoping they too will candidly admit their own struggles with sin and that together they will seek God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Have you ever found yourself wanting to yell out with Paul, “I do not understand my own actions.”? For I do not do what I want, what I know is good, but I do the very thing I know is wrong!” I can tell you “I’ve been there and done that!” Something tells me I’ll be there and do that again and again many times before I die.

Sin is made possible by the freedom God gives us to choose what we will do and how we will live. As Roger Shinn points out, **“Sin is a violation of the order and law of God, but this violation stems from a failure to use our freedom in love. All sin represents at some point our refusal to entrust our lives to God in a personal, loving, hopeful affirmation that we belong to one community of life with God and our neighbor. Sin is self-isolation, the will to separate, and thus to remain untouched by the needs of others and our own need for honest outgoing love.”** (*We Believe* p. 58)

I’m glad the statement of faith candidly speaks of our sins but what I find particularly intriguing is the way the statement of faith connects its talk of sin to of **“aimlessness.”** Remember the old proverbial warning, “If you don’t stand for something you will fall for anything.”? There is a connection between being aimless and sins. True we can have aims and still sin, no question about it. No one had clear aims than Paul and yet we remember his words on this matter. None the less, it is true that not having and aims, goals, or structure in life will make it far easier for us to “fall for anything.”

I have to say that I was among the many people who thought there was entirely too much attention given to Michael Jackson’s death this past week. I felt the same way about the death of Princess

Diana and Elvis Presley. Such attention represents the trivialization that is taking place in the culture.

I do believe that Michael Jackson was one of the greatest performers of all time. His unexpected death at an early age was certainly a tragedy for his family and friends and a loss to the entertainment world.

Clearly Michael Jackson had many problems. No doubt his great celebrity and his father robbing him of his childhood by push him out on the stage at the age of 8 with his brothers and sister didn't help. Looking at all the pictures of Michael Jackson through the years and the physical transformation he went through, with the help of plastic surgery and other medical treatments, it was clear that he was not comfortable even in his own skin.

It may be true that many people today do not "feel" guilty about sin in their lives. But many in the baby boom generation and the generations that have followed, speak of a lack of meaning in life, a lack of purpose. Perhaps this is an even greater problem than dealing with sin. Indeed, as I pointed out in the beginning of this section, it may be that very lack of meaning and purpose that provides a vacuum for sins of all kinds to take hold of one's life.

Some of you are not old enough to remember the 1966 movie with Michael Caine, "Alfie." You might remember the remake with Jude Law in 2004. In the movie a serial womanizer sets out to conquer one woman after another. He finally begins to learn that question this rather meaningless existence. The title song, sung by Dionne Warwick, asks the question "**What's it all about Alfie? Is it only for the moment we live?**" That is indeed the question.

Contrast these two great thinkers. The first is Bertran Russell who said of humanity, “[**Our**] **growth, [our] hopes and fears, [our] loves and [our] beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms...**” The second is C.S. Lewis, who wrote in *Mere Christianity*: “**If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out it has no meaning: just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. Dark would be a word without meaning.**” Lewis is saying that unless we were meant to find meaning in life we wouldn’t even feel the lack of meaning in our lives.

This is where we come to the boldest part of our section of the statement of faith for today, “**God seeks in holy love** to save all people from aimlessness and sin.” This is indeed a bold claim! Many do not believe this, but many of the greatest saints and mystics of all ages have proclaimed it to be true. The Apostle Paul, after gives his primal yell “**Wretched man that I am!**” continues “**Who will rescue me from this body of death?**” (Romans 7:24) Paul answer this question with praise and doxology. He answers with praise because he felt in the depth of his being that indeed the question had been answered by God on the road to Damascus and on an ongoing basis since that moment. “**Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!**” (Romans 76:26)

Joan Chittister concludes her chapter on “I believe with these thoughts, born of a lifetime of prayer and meditation, “**Without belief in something greater than ourselves, answers to the questions of why we’re here, what we’re doing, and how we are to live fade**

**like gray ghosts on a white horizon. Then life shrinks to the dimensions of our own small selves, captured and trapped in an even smaller box. Then life becomes just one more anthill in space. Belief in God may not be provable, true, but it is hard to imagine anything more senseless than unbelief.”**

This has been my experience as well. In moments of insight, in moments of sheer blind trust, in fleeting mystic glimpses I have sensed what can only be described as God “seeking in holy love” to save me, and all, “from aimlessness and sin.” These moments have not been as frequent as I would like, but like many, I am not always open to the movement of God’s Spirit. I have sensed enough though, that when I am moved to cry, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me...” the cry is directed to God. In your journey of faith may you know and continue to know that “God seeks you and all in holy love, to save you from aimlessness and sin. Amen.

what's it all about alfie  
is it just for the moment we live  
what's it all about when you sort it out alfie  
are we meant to take more than we give  
or are we meant to be kind  
and if only fools are kind alfie  
then i guess it's wise to be cruel  
and if life belongs only to the strong alfie  
what will you lend on an old golden rule

as sure as i believe there's something much more  
something even non-believers can believe in  
i believe in love alfie  
without true love we just exist alfie  
until you find the love you've missed you're nothing alfie  
when you walk let your heart lead the way  
and you'll find love any day alfie alfie