

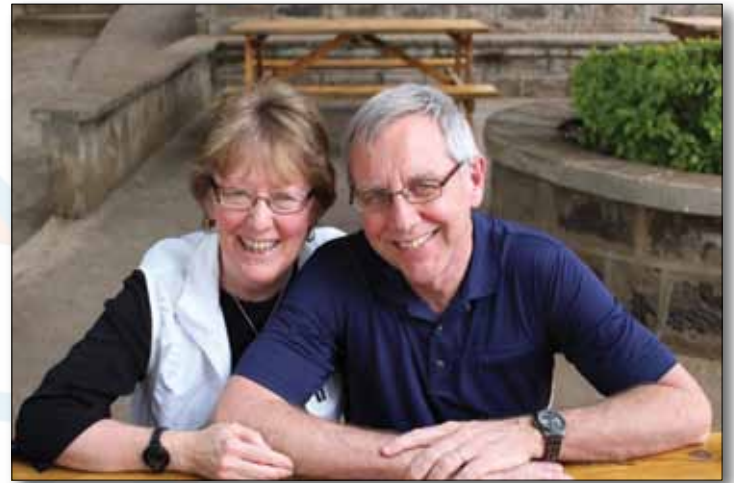
# The High Calling

a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society

## ***Felix Culpa***

The story is told about a dishonest house painter who cheated his customers by thinning his paint with water. His trickery remained undiscovered for years until one day when he was painting the outside of a church. Working from a scaffold, he had almost finished when a violent storm arrived suddenly. A gust of wind knocked him to the ground and a downpour of rain caused the cheap paint to begin to streak all over the church so that his dishonest ways were now visible to everyone. Then, like thunder, a Voice boomed from heaven: “Repaint! Repaint! And thin no more!”

Telling a funny story is a good way to ease into a subject that is not funny at all. The doctrine of sin is perhaps Christianity’s most unpopular subject. While there is wide cultural agreement that people like Hitler and Vlad the Impaler are evil sinners, the consensus quickly



evaporates when the notion of sin is applied to people like you and me. Oh, we may occasionally make errors of judgment and act inappropriately, but calling nice people like us sinners—well, that’s just too much.

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## **The Cure of Souls**

*By Leroy E. Lindsey, Jr.*



Leroy Lindsey, Ph.D. is a speaker with *The Francis Asbury Society* and also serves internationally as a missionary under *One Mission Society* in Theological Leadership Education and Discipleship. He lives with his wife, Kay, in Lafayette, NJ, and enjoys walking, reading, and cutting extremely detailed paper snowflakes.

Suppose someone suffers from a type of malady that, if left untreated, will surely be fatal. And suppose that person’s physician knows of a proven treatment that will completely cure the illness but then proceeds to prescribe a remedy that only makes the patient feel better. In other words, the *eradictive* treatment is available but the doctor chooses only the *palliative*<sup>†</sup>. While there are certain terminal cases where palliative care may be the best decision, in normal situations, when such a choice is presented, most people will elect the eradictive option, and possibly consider changing physicians.

Does the salvation offered by God to humanity only aim to alleviate the symptoms or does it promise a *cure* for the problem of sin? What kind of cure? Scripture states

<sup>†</sup> To lessen the severity of something without bringing a cure; to alleviate pain.

that Christ is “able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him” (Hebrews 7:25, NKJV). Paul declares that believers are “set free” from sin (Romans 6:18) and maintains that, in Christ, we can “put off” the sins of the flesh (Colossians 2:11). He goes on to say that sin in the believer can be “put to death” (Colossians 3:5; Romans 8:13), indicating a decisive, momentary action. And John states that the blood of Christ “cleanses us from all sin” (I John 1:7).

But how far-reaching is this cleansing? How complete is this death to sin? How radical is the cure? To use the analogy of physical healing—does the remedy offered treat only the symptoms of our disorder or does it reach down deep to its true cause? In other words, is salvation only *palliative*, or can it be called *eradictive*?

In his hymns, Charles Wesley echoed and reinforced the biblical doctrines taught in the sermons his brother John preached. Both John and Charles studied the biblical terms for sin and salvation and expressed them in ways people could understand and apply to their lives. The hymns especially draw on the biblical

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# This is War!

By Daniel V. Runyon



Daniel V. Runyon, Ph.D., Professor of English and Communication at Spring Arbor University, is an authority on John Bunyan and his works. He has edited a new edition of Bunyan's *The Holy War* which provides the basis for this article (John Bunyan. *The Holy War*. Ed. by Daniel V. Runyon. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012). While Bunyan's better known work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is primarily about the doctrine of justification, *The Holy War* reveals Bunyan's thoughts about sanctification. Though his Baptist theology comes through in both works, his genius for illustrating doctrinal truth through telling a story gives timeless worth to his writings for people of every theological persuasion. In this article, Dr. Runyon focuses on how Bunyan depicts the ongoing battle with sin, which is so central to how sanctification is understood.

John Bunyan's concern in *The Holy War*, his sequel to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is to show how God sanctifies his church through spiritual warfare. The city of Mansoul (humanity) created by Shaddai (God) is conquered by Diabolus (Satan). Later redeemed by Emanuel (Jesus), it is then attacked from the inside by Diabolonians (demonic tempters) who have been hiding in the walls of the city. The citizens of Mansoul learn they can only win the battle against these evil influences by sincere prayer and the help of the Lord Chief Secretary (the Holy Spirit).

Emanuel warns the people that if they succumb to the snares of the Diabolonians their state will become "far worse" than when they were slaves in Egypt. Who are these Diabolonians? Bunyan identifies them as adultery, murder, anger, deceit, drunkenness, reveling, idolatry, witchcraft, strife, heresy, and more. Their aim is nothing less than to conquer Mansoul and reign there forever! These demonic tempters are similar to Paul's works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19–21 and Christ's list of evils in Mark 7:21–22.

Though these enemies are real and dangerous, the citizens of Mansoul need not suffer defeat. Emanuel has not only warned them in advance of the danger but has equipped them to root out these sins from their midst. But this will only be done through warfare. The process of defeating these Diabolonians (sins that remain after salvation) involves a battle to the death. To help equip them for the conflict, Emanuel distributes white robes to all the redeemed residing in the city. His instructions are to wear these robes daily and to "keep them always

white." But if somehow their robes do become dirty, "then speed you to do that which is written in my Law" and follow the path prescribed to make them white again.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the work of sanctification going on in Mansoul comes through a man living in the city named Mr. Carnal Security. By twisting the truth and grieving the Lord Chief Secretary (the Holy Spirit), he encourages the inhabitants of the city to trust in their own strength to defeat evil. He pretends there is nothing to fear and that, even if they do nothing, they are secure.

*The Holy War* ends with Emanuel's farewell speech where he promises to come back again and completely dismantle Mansoul and then

*carry the stones thereof, and the timber thereof, and the walls thereof, and the dust thereof, and the inhabitants thereof, into mine own Country, even into the Kingdom of my Father; and will there set it up in such strength and glory, as it never did see in the Kingdom where now it is placed.*



In *The Holy War*, John Bunyan is wrestling with the question: why does sin and evil persist in the lives of the redeemed? This is essentially what the book is all about.

Bunyan answers this question by showing how Emanuel explains to the citizens of Mansoul that the Diabolonians remain in the walls of city:

- to teach the art of spiritual warfare
- to call the believers to constant prayer
- and to maintain humility.

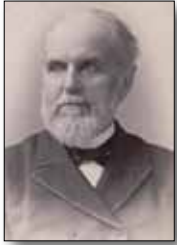
But most of all, Emanuel promises them that he will be present to help them in the battle. "Stand for me, Mansoul, against the Diabolonians, and I will stand for thee before my Father" (see Matthew 10:32–33).

Bunyan's classic book on spiritual warfare is all about winning the victory over the sins that continue to threaten us *after* redemption. The believer's sanctification depends on his remaining sober and vigilant against the presence of temptations to sin. The threat is real. But Emanuel has given all the resources necessary to ensure the ultimate victory. ✦



# Sin, Properly So-Called

By Daniel Steele (1824–1914)



Daniel Steele held the chair of Mental and Moral Philosophy at Syracuse University and was an influential voice in the nineteenth-century holiness movement. The following essay (abridged and slightly edited) is from his book *Milestone Papers* (Minneapolis: Bethany, first published in 1878), Chapter IV: “Sins, Infirmities, and the Atonement” (33–40).

Many minds cannot accept the possibility of Christian perfection, as presented in the gospel, because they confuse *infirmities* and *sins*. Though God, in his Word, has made a distinction between these two realities, some people are perpetually joining together what God has separated. My desire is to disentangle these confused ideas, hoping that it will perhaps help someone to find the way to full salvation.

1. *Infirmities* are failures to keep the law of perfect obedience given to Adam in Eden. This law no man on earth can keep, since sin has impaired the powers of universal humanity. *Sins* are offenses against the law of love, which is thus epitomized by John, “And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another” (I John 3:23).
2. *Infirmities* are an involuntary outflow from our imperfect moral organization. *Sin* is always voluntary. “You WILL not come unto me that you might have life” (John 5:40, emphasis added).
3. *Infirmities* have their ground in our physical nature, and they are aggravated by intellectual deficiencies. But *sin* roots itself in our moral nature.
4. *Infirmities* entail regret and humiliation. *Sin* always produces guilt.
5. *Infirmities* in well-instructed souls do not interrupt communion with God. *Sin* cuts the telegraphic communication with heaven.
6. *Infirmities*, hidden from ourselves, are covered by the blood of Christ even without a definite act of faith, in the case of the soul vitally united with him. *Sins* demand a special resort to the blood of sprinkling and an act of reliance on Christ.
7. *Infirmities* are without remedy so long as we are in the body. *Sins*, by the keeping power of Christ, are

avoidable through every hour of our regenerate life. Only in heaven will our *infirmities* disappear, but we are to be saved from *sins* now.

8. A thousand *infirmities* are consistent with perfect love, but not one *sin*.

See how David prayed: “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret [unconscious] faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous [willful, high-handed] sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be upright [perfect] and innocent from the great transgression” (Psalm 19:12–13). David expects to fall into errors and unconscious faults and asks to be cleansed from them. But he prays to be kept from known and voluntary sins. Hence it is evident that *sins* are incompatible with David’s idea of perfection but unnoticed and involuntary *infirmities* are not.



When God sums up the life and character of King Asa, he declares that “the heart of Asa was perfect all his days” (II Chronicles 15:17). Yet we find that he failed to take away all the high places of idolatrous worship. Furthermore, he was angry with Hanani the prophet, who rebuked him for his lack of trust in God. When Asa became sick, later in life, he sought the help

of physicians, not the Lord (II Chronicles 16:10–12). Doubtless, many of Asa’s contemporaries saw great imperfections in these outward acts but the Lord, who looks at the heart, chisels on his tombstone this enviable epitaph, “Perfect all his days.”

Though *sins* and *infirmities* are distinct from one another, in one respect they are alike: they both need the atonement. Even our human lawcourts recognize this truth. A pharmacist who causes the death of someone by unknowingly dispensing the wrong medication may be found guilty of a crime and punished. Yet we intuitively understand that this was involuntary and no willful act of murder. When it comes to God, however, we can be sure that he always provides an atonement for such sins, and never executes sentence unless his atonement is rejected. “The times of ignorance God overlooked” (Acts 17:30). Hence, the law of God is more merciful than the statues of men.

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# There's Fungus Among Us

By Stan Key



The Bible uses a number of different metaphors to describe sin: a burden, a stain, a debt, bondage, etc. Each description gives a different picture of both sin's destructive power and its remedy. But few pictures the Bible uses are more powerful than that of leprosy. Two entire chapters in the book of Leviticus are

devoted to the subject of "skin disease," giving what is perhaps the best introduction to the doctrine of sin in the entire Bible. The passage is full of technical instructions for a priest to follow when an Israelite comes to him for counsel concerning a rash on his skin, a spot on his clothing, or a fungus growing in his house. "Is this something I should be worried about?" he wants to know. Getting the diagnosis right is of life and death importance! Leviticus 13–14 shows us at least seven ways that leprosy helps us to better understand sin.

## 1. Like leprosy, sin, in its early stages, is difficult to detect.

Distinguishing between eczema, psoriasis, mildew, mold, fungus, and leprosy is harder than you think! This is why Moses tells the people to visit a priest if they have a skin problem, moldy clothing, or fungus growing in their house. The priest has been trained to discern the difference between what is clean and what is unclean. Sin is like that. In its early stages it is very difficult to detect: just a little indiscretion, some edgy entertainment, a white lie. It's nothing. Right? Sometimes it takes the wisdom of an older saint to help us discern the truth about our spiritual condition.

## 2. Like leprosy, sin spreads from one part of the body to another.

The problem with leprosy is that it never stays in the same place. It starts as an itch on my scalp but then next week there is a rash on my thigh. Next month, I discover numbness in my left foot. In a similar manner, sin never stays contained. Like cancer, it keeps metastasizing. One drink soon becomes three. Betting \$10 on a football game soon becomes gambling \$100 at the casino. Watching R-rated movies soon turns into a regular diet of pornography. Like leprosy, sin's destructive influence just keeps expanding from one area of life to another.

## 3. Like leprosy, sin is contagious.

Not only does leprosy spread within the body but also it spreads to other people! That is why Moses insists that lepers be put outside the camp—not because they are hated but because they are dangerous to the community. One leper is a threat to everyone else! Unconfessed sin is like that. Left untreated, it has the potential to spread from one person to another. To keep company with people who profess to be Christian while living in willful and continual sin is similar to inviting someone with the Ebola virus to your house for dinner! Hebrews 12:15 states the danger clearly: "See to it... that no 'root of bitterness' springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled."

## 4. Like leprosy, sin is a much deeper problem than you think.

At first, that spot on your arm appears to be nothing more than a little rash. You apply some cream and think all will be well. But if the problem is leprosy, you have



only treated the symptom, not the cause. In the Bible, leprosy is not just something you *have*. It is who you *are*. It defines you! You *are* a leper. So it is with sin. You are not a sinner because you sin. Rather, you sin because you *are* a sinner! Sin is not just what you do, it defines who you are. Modifying behavior only treats the symptoms. What is needed is a remedy that goes deep, to the source.

## 5. Like leprosy, sin destroys your pain sensors.

A leper may break his arm, put his hand in the fire, or get a grain of sand in his eye, and never even know it! You may think it would be wonderful not to feel any pain, right? Think again. Someone who doesn't feel pain has no warning system to alert him when his body tries to tell him that something is wrong. The ability to feel bodily pain is a *gift*! In a similar manner, sin destroys our spiritual pain sensors. Engaging in sinful behaviors and attitudes has the capacity to deaden our conscience. This is *not* good. The pain of a guilty conscience is the very motivation we need to cause us to run to Jesus for salvation before it is too late. Like the light on your car's dash board, when it comes on—go see a mechanic!

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# The Missing Bead

By Chris Lohrstorfer



Chris Lohrstorfer, PhD., is Vice President for Academic Affairs and Assistant Professor of Wesleyan Theology at Wesley Biblical Seminary in Jackson, MS. In addition, he is entering into his 22nd year as senior pastor at Hinds Independent Methodist Church in Raymond, MS. Dr. Lohrstorfer's latest book is *Learning to Breathe: Mastering the Art of Spiritual Respiration*.

Do you remember those bracelets many Christians wore as a witnessing tool some years ago? They had colored beads that helped to tell the story of the gospel to others. It began with a *black* bead, a reminder that all have sinned. Next came a *red* bead representing the blood of Christ followed by a *white* bead denoting the forgiveness that comes to those who put their faith in Jesus. A *blue* bead was next, for baptism; then *green*, for growth. Finally, a *yellow* bead represented the ultimate goal of salvation: the streets of gold in heaven. Voila! The gospel story told with a bracelet.

It always seemed to me, however, that something was missing in that presentation. The more I thought about it, the stronger my conviction became that the starting point was wrong. Where the gospel *begins* will have a determining effect on where the gospel *ends*. A gospel that starts with sin will, by definition, end with forgiveness for sinners in heaven. Such a gospel has no real need for transformation of human nature or a deeper work of grace producing holiness. It's clear to me now that perhaps the greatest flaw in the typical evangelical gospel presentation is how we conceive the starting place.

One thing I have appreciated about my study of John Wesley is the way he describes where to begin in presenting the gospel. Typically, he begins his presentation of the gospel by talking about man created in the image of God. In the beginning, the first human couple was holy. God's purpose in creation was for humans to reflect the very relational life of the triune God. Once that piece of information is firmly in place, *then* Wesley moves to describe how sin enters the story. Wesley's sermon *The New Birth* is an example. He insists that the reason we need to be born again is not so much because we are sinners, but rather this is the only way we can be re-created in the image of God. Before sin entered the picture, Adam and Eve perfectly reflected the image

of their holy Creator. They were holy, righteous, and good.

*Although man was made in the image of God, yet he was not made immutable.... He was created able to stand and yet liable to fall. And this God himself apprized him of and gave him solemn warning against it. Nevertheless, man did not abide in honor: he fell from his high estate.*

And what was the result of sin? The consequences involved more than guilt and shame. Adam and Eve were separated from God and his holy image was severely distorted. Salvation, for Wesley, always involves more than getting our sins forgiven so that we can go to heaven when we die. Salvation is about remaking us to what we were supposed to be in the first place!

Back in the 1990s when I worked for a Christian college that used the beaded bracelets as an evangelistic tool, we came up with a creative alternative. We taught our



ministry teams a new way to tell the gospel story which necessitated a change in the design of the bracelet. Our students had bracelets that began with a *clear* bead! "Men and women were created pure and holy, in the very image of God," we taught them to say,

*But sin (the black bead) came into our lives through a rebellious choice to disobey God and now that original design has become dramatically disfigured. We are not now what God originally created us to be! But Jesus came as a redemptive sacrifice (the red bead), bringing new life—sinful actions forgiven and sinful nature cleansed. This means we can now live a holy life, restored to the image in which we were first created (the white bead). Discipleship (the blue bead) and growth (the green bead) keep the process of grace alive in our hearts so that we finally enter the city of God (the yellow bead).*

When it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, where you begin determines where you will end. For the believer, sin has neither the first word nor the last. We were created to be like God, and through the blood of Calvary and the Spirit of Pentecost his image can once again be restored in your life and mine! ✨

# Know Your Disease! Know Your Cure!

By John Wesley (1703–1791)



Few people understood better than John Wesley how one's understanding of sin (the problem) sets the stage for one's understanding of salvation (the solution). This article is an abridged and edited version of Sermon XLIV, entitled "Original Sin" based on the text Genesis 6:5 (*The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 6. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978).

God's description of the human condition is very different from those happy pictures of human nature which so many have drawn down through the ages. Not only have ancient writers and pagans delighted in speaking of innate human goodness, but many who bear the name of Christ speak as if mankind were all innocence and perfection. And is it any wonder that such descriptions are welcomed and received by the great majority of mankind? For who is not easily persuaded to think favorably of himself? Indeed, the situation is such that it is now quite unfashionable to say anything that would disparage human nature in any way.

But what must we do with our Bibles? For they will never agree with such a rosy picture of the human condition! Many verses could be quoted but none is more straightforward than our text.

*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5)*

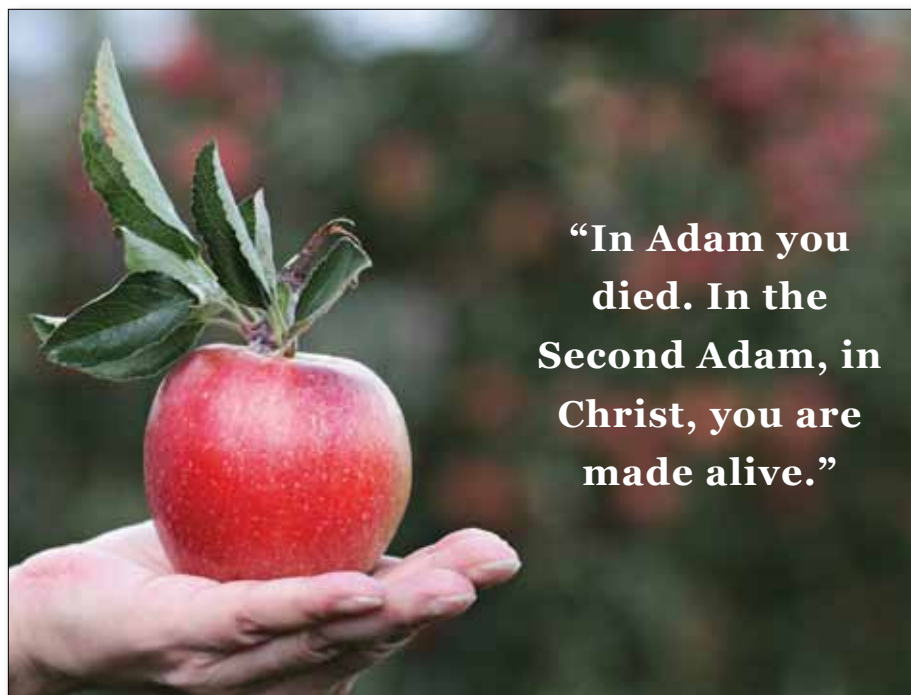
Notice first of all how this text describes what men were like before the flood: "the wickedness of man was great." Not just this man or that man. Not a few men only. But *all* men, universally, the whole human race and every particular member! Only one man in all the earth, Noah, "found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). All the rest shared in the same guilt, as they were to share in the same punishment.

Note further how God saw that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." He saw every inclination, affection, passion, appetite, temper, design, and thought. He saw every word and action. God

saw that all this was "evil;" contrary to moral rectitude, contrary to the nature of God, contrary to the divine will. But was there not some good mingled with the evil? No, none at all. It was "*only* evil." In their flesh dwelt no good thing (Romans 7:18). Were there no intervals when something good could be found in the hearts of these men before the flood? No. Every year, every day, every hour, every moment, these men never deviated into good.

But what about today? Are we to believe that men are the same now, after the flood? The answer to this question is certainly yes. In many places, the Bible affirms this solemn truth. Over a thousand years after the flood, David declared, "They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt, there is none who does good,

not even one" (Psalm 14:3). In another place, Isaiah speaks this way: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds" (Isaiah 1:6). The same account is given by all the apostles in the New Testament as well. From all these we learn, concerning man in his natural state, unassisted by



the grace of God, that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart" is still "only evil," and that "continually."

This biblical account of the present state of man's wickedness is confirmed by daily experience. It is true, the natural man doesn't see this but this is not to be wondered at. So long as a man born blind continues in his blindness, he is unaware of what he can't see. But as soon as God opens the eyes of his understanding, he will see the true condition of his soul.

I will conclude my sermon by drawing a few inferences from what has been said. First, we should see how this doctrine (original sin) is the first grand distinguishing point between Christianity and all other religions. Though heathen religions often describe the vices of particular men, they are unaware of man's original fall

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# The “S” Word

By Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.



Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., PhD., professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, wants to restore the word “sin” to contemporary discourse. He rightly recognizes that if we can’t speak about sin, then we can’t speak of salvation either. In light of the present moral climate in our culture, perhaps no topic is more relevant than this. The following article is a slightly edited abridgment taken from

the opening and closing words of his excellent book *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995): ix–x, xiii, 5, 199.

I am trying to retrieve an old awareness that has slipped and changed in recent decades. The awareness of sin used to be our shadow. Christians hated sin, feared it, fled from it, grieved over it. Some of our grandparents agonized over their sins. A man who lost his temper might wonder whether he could still go to Holy Communion. A woman who for years envied her more attractive and intelligent sister might worry that this sin threatened her very salvation. But that shadow has dimmed. Nowadays, the accusation *you have sinned* is often said with a grin, and with a tone that signals an inside joke.

As a child growing up in the fifties among Western Michigan Calvinists,

I think I heard as many sermons about sin as I did about grace. The assumption in those days seemed to be that you couldn’t understand either without understanding both. Many American Christians recall sermons in which preachers got visibly angry over a congregation’s sin. When these preachers were in full cry, they would make red-faced, finger-pointing accusations: “*You are sinners—filthy, guilty, miserable, sinners!*”

You were never in doubt what these preachers were talking about. They were talking about sin. But in today’s group confessionals, it is harder to tell. The newer language of Zion fudges: “Let us confess our problem with human relational adjustment dynamics, and especially our feebleness in networking.” Or, “I’d just like to share that we just need to target holiness as a growth area.” Where sin is concerned, people mumble now.

Anyone who tries to recover the knowledge of sin these days must overcome long odds. To put it mildly, modern consciousness does not encourage moral reproach; in particular, it does not encourage self-reproach. The word *sin* now finds its home mostly on dessert menus. “Peanut Butter Binge” and “Chocolate Challenge” are sinful; lying is not. The new measure for sin is caloric.

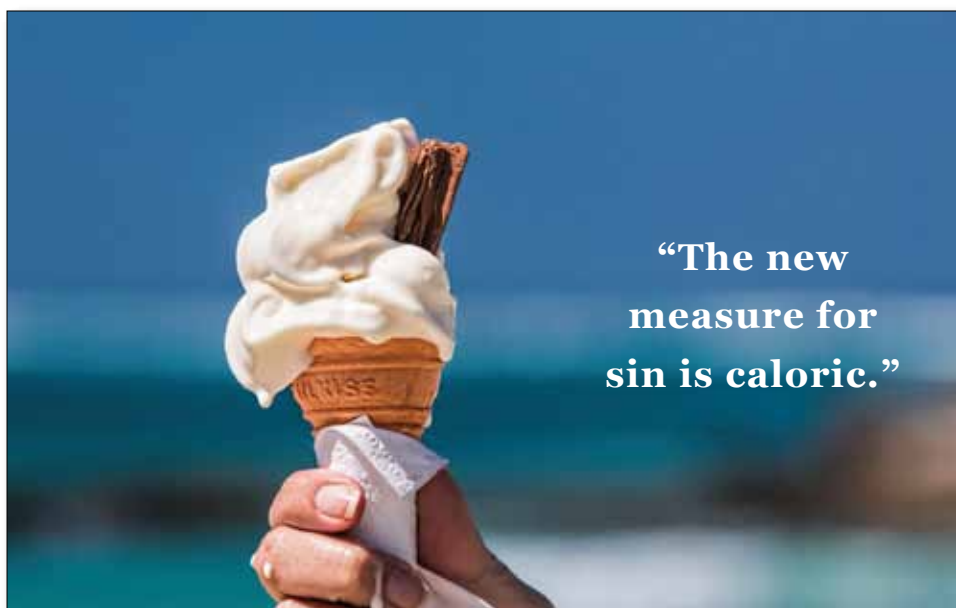
My goal is to renew the knowledge of a persistent reality that used to evoke in us fear, hatred, and grief. Many of us have lost this knowledge, and we ought to regret the loss. For slippage in our consciousness of sin, like most fashionable follies, may be pleasant, but it is also devastating. Self-deception about sin is a narcotic, a tranquilizing and disorienting suppression of our spiritual central nervous system. What’s devastating about it is that when we lack an ear for wrong notes

in our lives, we cannot play right ones or even recognize them in the performances of others. Eventually we make ourselves religiously so unmusical that we miss both the exposition and the recapitulation of the main themes God plays in human life. The music of creation and the still greater music of grace whistle

right through our skulls, causing no catch of breath and leaving no residue. Moral beauty begins to bore us. The idea that the human race needs a Savior sounds quaint.

At the center of the Christian Bible, four Gospels describe the pains God has taken to defeat sin and its wages. The very shape of these Gospels tells us how much the pains matter: the Gospels are shaped, as Martin Kähler famously put it, as passion narratives with long introductions. Accordingly, Christians have always measured sin, in part, by the suffering needed to atone for it.

The Bible presents sin by way of major concepts, principally lawlessness and faithlessness, expressed in an array of images: sin is the missing of a target, a wandering from the path, a straying from the fold. Sin



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language for sin's remedy. Methodists were taught to sing that sin could, and should, be "crucified," "killed," "cast out," "healed," and "cleansed." Such pictorial language made the remedy vivid and dynamic in the minds of the early Methodists. Charles Wesley often spoke of redemption as true health returned to the soul. The desire for full salvation was usually expressed as a longing yet to be fulfilled, but in some places the poetry testifies to a present reality.

Being well-versed in the biblical vocabulary depicting our sinful condition, Charles used strong language to describe indwelling sin. He could speak of a "bent to sinning," a "stony heart," an "infected nature," or an inner "fountain" of corruption. He taught the early Methodists how to sing about their sinful condition by describing how inbred sin makes the soul "dead," "asleep," "broken," "blind," "deaf," "bruised," and "captive." In many instances, his hymns were actually prayers to God for healing from this deep-seated disease of sin.

One of the most interesting metaphors Charles Wesley uses to describe our spiritual disease is when he refers (at least 13 times in his hymns) to sin as a "mountain" that needs to be "removed," "cast out," or "made into a plain." The imagery comes from Zechariah 4:6–7.

*This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain....*

In Charles Wesley's mind, indwelling sin is the "mountain" and Christ is our "Zerubbabel." Such a mountain cannot be removed by human might or power but only by God's Spirit. Christ has come to save us by turning the mountain into a plain. (See Wesley's hymn *O Great Mountain, Who Art Thou?* in the quote box.)

The promise of "full salvation" from "all sin" through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit is what helped make the message of the Wesleys so powerful in the eighteenth century. How we need this message today! The gospel of Christ still offers a full remedy to the problem of sin. God desires not just to alleviate the symptoms of our soul's disease; he wants to bring about a full cure! He doesn't just want to *palliate* our sinful condition; he wants to *eradicate* it! ✨



**I**n May, FAS President Stan Key spoke at the commencement services for Wesley Biblical Seminary (WBS). During the services, WBS awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree. ✨

## O Great Mountain, Who Art Thou?†

*By Charles Wesley*

*O great mountain, who art thou,  
Immense, immovable?  
High as heaven aspires thy brow,  
Thy foot sinks deep as hell.  
Thou, alas, I long have known,  
Long have felt thee fixed within;  
Still beneath thy weight I groan—  
Thou art indwelling sin.*

*Thou art darkness in my mind,  
Perverseness in my will!  
Love inordinate and blind,  
That always cleaves to ill;  
Every passion's wild excess,  
Anger, lust, and pride thou art;  
Thou art sin and sinfulness,  
And unbelief of heart.*

*Not by human might or power  
Canst thou be moved from hence,  
But thou shalt flow down before  
Divine omnipotence;  
My Zerubbabel is near,  
I have not believed in vain;  
Thou, when Jesus doth appear,  
Shalt sink into a plain.*

*Christ the head, the corner-stone,  
Shall be brought forth in me;  
Glory be to Christ alone,  
His grace shall set me free!  
I shall shout my Saviour's name,  
Him I evermore shall praise,  
All the work of grace proclaim,  
Of sanctifying grace.*

*Christ has the foundation laid,  
And Christ shall build me up;  
Surely I shall soon be made  
Partaker of my hope;  
Author of my faith he is,  
He its finisher shall be;  
Perfect love shall seal me his  
To all eternity.*

† Can be sung to the tune *Praise the Lord Who Reigns Above* (Amsterdam).



How differently the Bible talks about the human condition. In God's eyes, we are not sinners because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners. Behavior modification doesn't deal with the real problem. Sin defines who I am before it describes what I do.

C. S. Lewis states the matter well in *Mere Christianity*: "Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms." The problem is worse than you think!

I have a doctor named Grimm (I'm not kidding). When I visit Dr. Grimm, he smiles and is very pleasant. But let me tell you, he deserves his name! When I go for an appointment, we exchange brief formalities and then he tells me to undress. He pokes and prods me in places that not even my wife knows about. And then he has the audacity to ask very personal and embarrassing questions! Why do I submit to such humiliation? You know the answer as well as I. A doctor who doesn't aggressively examine his patients to discover the diseases that may be lurking in their bodies is guilty of medical malpractice. There can be no hope of health without an accurate understanding of what is wrong. Dr. Grimm found cancer hiding in my body a few years ago and may have saved my life. Frankly, I'm grateful for his intrusive and offensive ways!

So it is in our spiritual lives. The process of uncovering the problem may be painful, but the end result is well worth it. *Felix culpa* is a Latin phrase meaning "happy fault" or "blessed guilt." The phrase was first used to refer to Adam's original sin as being a "fortunate" thing because it made possible our redemption. Though there is nothing good about sin, there is something *very* good that happens when we recognize and confess our sinfulness. This issue of *The High Calling* is devoted to the doctrine of sin: what it is, how deep it goes, and most importantly, what is the cure. We send it out with the prayer that it will help us all better understand the true nature of our sin problem *so that* we can better understand the true nature of the salvation that Jesus came to offer. ✨

**"Though there is nothing good about sin, there is something very good that happens when we recognize and confess our sinfulness."**

## The General Confession

After giving God a quick recital of the naughty things they said and did last week, many Christians today imagine that their duty of confession is complete. But superficial confession can only produce superficial Christians. Since the sixteenth century, *The Book of Common Prayer* has helped many to find words to better express their true sinful condition to God. We have included these words in this edition of *The High Calling* in the hopes that they will help our readers take a further step in dealing with the dwelling-in-me sin. Try it yourself! You may be surprised at what happens.

**A**lmighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amaker of all things, judge of all men: We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, by thought, word and deed, against thy divine majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; for thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life, to the honor and glory of thy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. ✨



## 6. Like leprosy, sin, in its advanced stages, is hideous and repulsive.

After years of leprosy, the body becomes a deformed mass of oozing sores and foul odors. So it is with sin. At first, sin appears innocent, fun, and attractive. But don't be fooled. "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). It's interesting how the advertising industry portrays the lives of those who drink alcohol: young, happy, slender, prosperous, and surrounded by lots of friends. Those who market alcohol never show us what someone looks like after decades of guzzling their product.



## 7. Like leprosy, sin will kill you!

Romans 6:23 says it best: "The wages of sin is death." The mortality rate is 100 percent.

So far, we have seen the bad news about the leprosy of sin. Does the good news of salvation have anything to say about our sinful condition? I'm so glad you asked! The coming of Jesus changed everything.

*And a leper came to Jesus, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, [Jesus] stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. And Jesus said to him... "Go show yourself to the priest...." (Mark 1:40-45)*

Few passages in the Bible are more dramatic than this. When Jesus touches the leper, he is breaking the law that he helped to write! Everyone knew what would happen next: Jesus would become impure, he would contract leprosy. Right? Not this time! For the first time in history, the law of nature was reversed. Rather than Jesus becoming unclean, the leper becomes clean. The contagion of holiness is stronger than the contagion of sin!

Your sin problem is worse than you think but the cleansing power of Jesus is greater than you ever dreamed! An old gospel song written by Adger McDavid Page says it well:

*Conscious of the deep pollution,  
Sinners wander in the night,  
Tho' they hear the Shepherd calling,  
They still fear to face the light.  
This the blessed consolation,  
That can melt the heart of stone,  
That sweet Balm of Gilead reaches  
Deeper than the stain has gone! ✨*

## Supporting Our Ministry

*By Charlie Fiskeaux*

There are many ways to support the ministries of the Francis Asbury Society. The first priority is prayer. Every part of FAS is critically dependent upon your consistent and direct prayer support.

But then, FAS is also a tangible ministry that requires financial support in order to be viable. Each FAS ministry (speaking, publishing, and discipling) is supported with contributions specifically directed by the donor. However, every ministry of FAS also receives a base of support provided through the Ministry Center. This base of support for all ministries is possible because of the *General Fund*.

While all FAS ministries are worthy of your contributions, General Fund contributions support every FAS ministry. We seek persons who will commit to a "Leadership 100" level of giving, which is \$100 per month to the General Fund. However, if your family budget cannot accommodate that level, then we will be grateful for your gifts of any amount or schedule, as the Lord leads you. Your regular support enables proclamation of the gospel message that we can be "wholly devoted to God" with an undivided heart.

Details for various methods of giving are also available on our website at [francisasburysociety.com/support](http://francisasburysociety.com/support). Thank you for your participation with us in both prayers and gifts. ✨





Know Your Disease! *continued from page 6*

and so none of them know of man's total corruption. They are wholly ignorant of the entire depravation of human nature.

Secondly, we must recognize that all who deny this, call it original sin or by some other title, are but heathens still, in the fundamental point which differences heathenism from Christianity. Ask someone these questions: Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is his soul totally corrupted? Is every imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually? Those who answer yes to such questions are, at least to this degree, Christian. Those who deny these truths are still in a state of heathenism.

**“This doctrine of original sin prepares us to understand the true nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”**

Thirdly, we see how this doctrine of original sin prepares us to understand the true nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Knowing the reality of sin helps us to understand how the Great Physician applies medicines to heal the soul from the disease of sin. God heals our unbelief by the knowledge of him and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent by giving the gift of faith. By repentance and lowliness of heart, the deadly disease of pride is healed. Our self-will is healed by a meek and thankful submission to the will of God. And our love of the world is healed by the sovereign remedy of the love of God. Indeed, if man were not thus fallen, there would be no need for this work in the heart, this renewal in the spirit of our mind. Outward reformation would be sufficient to deal with the problem.

But you have not so learned the oracles of God! From Scriptures, you know that the great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parents. You know that all religion which does not answer this end is a poor farce and mere mockery of God, to the destruction of our own soul. Oh, beware of false teachers! Don't listen to them, even if they come to you with smooth language, professing an earnest goodwill for your soul, seeming to reverence the Holy Scriptures. Keep to the plain, old faith, “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Know your disease! Know your cure! You were born in sin. Therefore, “you must be born again” (John 3:3, 7). By nature you are wholly corrupted. By grace you shall be wholly renewed. In Adam you died. In the Second Adam, in Christ, you are made alive. Now, go on from faith to faith, until your whole sickness is healed! ✨

The “S” Word *continued from page 7*

is a hard heart and a stiff neck. Sin is blindness and deafness. It is both the overstepping of a line and the failure to reach it—both transgression and shortcoming. Sin is a beast crouching at the door. These and other images suggest deviance: even when it is familiar, sin is never normal. Sin is disruption of created harmony and then resistance to divine restoration of that harmony. Above all, sin disrupts and resists the vital human relation to God.

To speak of sin by itself, to speak of it apart from the realities of creation and grace, is to forget the resolve of God. God wants shalom and will pay any price to get it back. Human sin is stubborn, but not as stubborn as the grace of God and not half so persistent, not half so ready to suffer to win its way. Moreover, to speak of sin by itself is to misunderstand its nature: sin is only a parasite, a vandal, a spoiler. Sinful life is a partly depressing, partly ludicrous caricature of genuine human life. To concentrate on our rebellion, defection, and folly—to say to the world “I have some bad news and I have some bad news”—is to forget that the center of the Christian religion is not our sin but our Savior.

To speak of sin without grace is to minimize the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the fruit of the Spirit, and the hope of shalom. But to speak of grace without sin is surely no better. To do this is to trivialize the cross of Jesus Christ and to cheapen the grace of God that always comes to us with blood on it. In short, for the Christian church to ignore, euphemize, or otherwise mute the lethal reality of sin is to cut the nerve of the gospel. For the sober truth is that without full disclosure on sin, the gospel of grace becomes impertinent, unnecessary, and finally uninteresting. ✨

Sin, Properly So-Called *continued from page 3*

John Wesley explains the difference between *sins* (voluntary transgressions) and *infirmities* (involuntary transgressions) in these helpful words:


*Not only sin, properly so-called, that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law; but sin, improperly so-called, that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown, needs the atoning blood. I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes the involuntary transgressions, which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorances and mistakes inseparable from mortality. Therefore sinless perfection is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. I believe a person filled with the love of God is liable to involuntary transgressions. In view of this truth it is eminently appropriate for the holiest soul on earth to say daily, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” ✨*

The Francis Asbury Society

*Jesus*

THE ONE WHO SAVES US FROM OUR SINS

Featuring Dr. Chris Bounds



**Hemlock Inn Retreats 2018**

Our featured speaker is Dr. Chris Bounds, professor of Wesleyan Theology at Asbury University and chairman of the Board of Directors for the Francis Asbury Society. Come study the biblical understanding of sin and explore how Jesus saves us from it. Visit [www.francisasburysociety.com/hemlock](http://www.francisasburysociety.com/hemlock) for schedule and session details.

**“It would be well for the preacher of the gospel to impress upon minds of those who hear him, that Jesus did not come so much to save men from hell, or to save men for heaven, but to save men from sin. Salvation from sin settles all these other questions.”**

**—attributed to H. C. Morrison**

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*The High Calling* is a bimonthly publication of The Francis Asbury Society to serve as a link between FAS and its constituents, building loyalty and awareness so that the teaching and experience of Christian holiness may continue to be lived and proclaimed throughout the world.

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*The High Calling*

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