

Testamentum Imperium
An International Theological Journal

www.PreciousHeart.net/ti

Volume 1 – 2005-2007

An Endeavour of Grace: A Struggle Against Social Sin

Dr. Maake J. Masango
Professor of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria
United Presbyterian Church of South Africa

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Introduction

This paper deals with the issue of sin. There are hard experiences in our lives, which are simply a part of what it means to be finite creatures. As human beings we miss the mark, because it is part of our creaturely experience that, in life we sin and die. As human beings we are tempted by sin. Real evil enters the picture when we refuse to accept our own finiteness, because we are not God. We are bound to experience the dark side of our lives. One could therefore ask what is sin? Sin is an act of deviation from responsibility given to us by God. We therefore choose our own will, instead of the divine will, disobeying that law which is binding upon us as a rule of present action. In short, it is the willful violation of the known law of God.

One of the most difficult parts in our life is the way we misuse the gifts given to us by God. For example, creation is a gift given to human beings. Ours is to continue caring for this gift. Let us talk about sex, which is also a gift from God. Sex was meant and preserved for marriage. Today, young girls conceive and have children at the age of twelve. Let me share with the reader that sin is not only restricted to sex or moral issues, it goes beyond that. These days evil has disguised itself in different ways, e.g. poverty, greed, bribery, etc. Sin that human beings embark on has three dimensions:

(a) Firstly, it is always rebellion against God, and the order of God's creation; (b) it is always enmity against our fellow human beings; (c) and it is always the self-destructive contradiction of what we ourselves were created to be. The worst form of evil, in other words, is revealed in sin. People find themselves surrounded by evil in their daily lives. Note that evil is more than sin. When we sin, we come under the spell of a power greater than ourselves, and our ability to resist, a power from which we cannot free ourselves. When a young boy or girl sells their body through prostitution, the person becomes trapped and controlled by evil, which is sinful. In order to help the person, we (the church) need to analyze the social structures that continue to oppress the person. For a prostitute to resist selling his/her body, we need to remove the social structure that continues to inhibit them to sin. In other words, sin is not just selling the body, but it also has elements of sinful structures bind by economical issues. Shirley had this to say about sin:

“We do evil, but when we do, we are trapped and controlled by evil. It dwells in us, yet somehow has an existence of its own outside us” (Guthrie 1968:175).

Once we are under this spell, we then follow its power and direction. Paul had this to say about sin: “I continue to do the things I do not wish to do”, one is simply bound in the spell of power. It is important that we do not judge people who are trapped in sin, but work out ways in which we could help them get out of the trap of sin. That was the pastoral approach of our Lord Jesus Christ while ministering on earth. A clear example is the one of the woman caught in an act of adultery. A lot of us will quickly condemn the woman, to the extent that we will forget that a man was also involved. Actually, the Pharisees did not even bring him with the woman to Jesus. Those who had power were ready to stone her to death. Let me remind the reader about what God said through Jesus:

“Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

We are called to care for those who sin against us, so that they and us may receive forgiveness from God. Jesus finally said to the woman: “Your sins are forgiven, go and sin no more” (John 8:11). It is in loving sinners that we will motivate them to resist sin. It is also important that in our ministry the church addresses social structures that continue to trap them in such a way that they continue sinning. In

order to talk about forgiveness, we need to address the issue of justice. In short, addressing the issue of sin, forces us to examine the issue of justice, especially the economic problem that forces people to sell their bodies.

Economic Problems

Analyzing sexual problems of sin, we need to address the economic structures that violate human beings and their dignity. Have you ever ask yourself this question, why is it that Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean have lots of poor people? It is because there are some evil structures that continue to oppress us. This is sinful.

The Old Testament prophets would have addressed the above issue, which has reduced the poor to become beggars. When God had given us the gifts of resource, yet we continue to be poor, we have to face the issue of justice. Schweiker says that

“economic justice is, of course, about fairness of exchange, distribution of goods and service, and the creation of wealth within the economic sphere” (Schweiker 1998:68).

If the above structure was maintained throughout the world, there will be no need for people to sell their body or their organs to rich people or countries for the sake of survival. Justice demands within the social structures a respect of human beings. It reminds us that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. It fashions a self-understanding of the worth of each person. It finally forces us to connect with our enemies in such a way that we can no longer avoid them. In the words of Sam Kobia it forces us to respect life. Kobia says

“justice brings out clearly the fullness of life which is shared by all created things, and is experienced in the harmony of their interdependence, and in their common dependence on God, the ground of being” (Kobia 2003:9).

In short, Eden becomes an ethical symbol for renewed enthusiasm in life. We are all sinful creatures and are in need of God’s grace. Life expresses itself through life. When one of us sin, we all fall short from the glory of God.

Conclusion

The reader should remember that it was through the cross that salvation came to all human beings, including sinners, prostitutes, homosexuals, even those who behave as righteous people like the Pharisees, scribes, making others to feel small and sinful. God is able to create good things out of evil. We therefore need to be careful that we do not become righteous by condemning others. Yes, we need to name evil and sin, but take the pastoral approach of caring for those who have missed the mark.

In conclusion, Jesus Christ is the risen Lord. Through the cross, Christ became the victim of evil, but also the victor over evil or sin. Remember, it is not Good Friday that has the last word, but Easter which is the highest point, which motivate us to resist sin. The powers of darkness are still at work, but we have victory in the love of God, who sent Christ to redeem us from sin. The struggle continues, let us go back to the basics, respecting God who is revealed to us in other people we meet daily. They may be sinners, but are still created in the image of God. Love them.

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