

Speaking Biblically



... its all in the words

Schedule

Speaking Biblically

12, 19, 26 Mar, 2, 9, 16 Apr

“What is needed is not teaching the use of new words but fighting the misuse of the great old words.”

Martin Buber

Words

“Instead of reading the Bible to assure ourselves that we are right, we would be better to read it to discover where we have not been listening.”

Raymond Brown ... *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*

Theology has developed largely using the non-literal use of scriptural language.

This is not a call to literalism ... or fundamentalism ... but an attempt to understand the biblical language as it was written.

“Philosophers (and, I might add, theologians) ‘stretch the meaning of words until they retain scarcely anything of the original sense.’”

Sigmund Freud

Words and Translation

“... Palestinian rabbis subsequently considered the day in which the Septuagint was completed as one of the most unfortunate in Israel’s history seeing that the Torah could never be adequately translated.”

- Septuagint ... Hebrew scriptures in Greek (begun 3rd cent BCE).
- This statement appears in the preface to the Jewish Publication Society 1917 translation of the Hebrew scriptures into English.

Pre-16th century Anglo-Saxons were generally not interested in translating the scriptures into English because ... “The vernacular (English) appeared simply and totally inadequate. Its use, it would seem, could end only in a complete enfeeblement of meaning and general abasement of values.”

- So ... the “Anglo-Saxons” continued to use the Vulgate ... the Hebrew and Christian scriptures translated into Latin by Jerome in the 5th century.

The Cambridge History of the Bible

An Approach

There are so many versions of the scriptures today, both Hebrew and Christian, in which key words are translated quite differently. These translations oftentimes result in differing understandings of biblical teachings.

Within these sessions we will examine key words/ concepts from the bible ... both Hebrew and Greek ... and examine the etymology and ancient understanding of these words ... in an attempt to get a better appreciation of the scripture writer's intent.

- etymology ... the origin and historical development of a word.

Words matter ...

Examples

The Question of Evil

From the Hebrew scriptures ... Isaiah 45:7 ...

- *“I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and **create evil**; I am HaShem, that doeth all these things.”* (JPS 1917)
- *“I form light and create darkness, I make weal and **create woe** - I the LORD do all these things.”* (JPS 1985)
- *“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and **create evil**: I the LORD do all these things.”* (KJV)
- *“I form light and create darkness, I make weal and **create woe**; I the LORD do all these things.”* (NRSV)
 - *weal* ... well-being
 - *woe* ... distress (extreme anxiety, sorrow, or pain)

Did God “create” ... “make” evil?

Other Translations

New International Version:

*“I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and **create disaster**; I, the LORD, do all these things.”*

New American Standard Bible:

*“I am the LORD, and there is no other, The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and **creating calamity**; I am the LORD who does all these.”*

Compare

“... I make peace, and create *evil* ...” (JPS 1917, KJV)

“... I make weal and create *woe* ...” (JPS 1985, NRSV)

“... I bring prosperity and create *disaster* ...” (NIV)

“... Causing well-being and creating *calamity* ...” (NAS)

What theological “truth” is one to take away from this verse?

- evil ? ... woe ? ... disaster ? ... calamity ? ...

The power of the translator ...

Hebrew: רַע ... *ra'* ... bad, evil, adversity, affliction.

From *ra'a'* ... break to pieces, to spoil, good for nothing.

Immanuel – Isaiah 7:14

*“Therefore the L-rd Himself shall give you a sign: behold, **the young woman shall conceive**, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (JPS 1917)*

*“Assuredly, my Lord will give you a sign of his own accord! Look, **the young woman is with child** and about to give birth to a son. Let her name him Immanuel.” (JPS 1985)*

*“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; Behold, **a virgin shall conceive**, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanu-el.” (KJV)*

*“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, **the young woman is with child** and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” (NRSV)*



Prophecy of Jesus' Birth ?

*“All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, **the virgin shall conceive** and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’”* (Matthew 1:22-23) (NRSV)

*“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, **the young woman is with child** and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.”* (Isaiah 7:14) (NRSV)

- In the Hebrew of Isaiah 7:14, the word *‘almah* is used ... *‘almah* ... means “young woman,” or “maiden” ... of a marriageable age.
- In the Gospel of Matthew, the Isaiah quote is clearly taken from the Septuagint ... the Hebrew scriptures in Greek ... where the Greek word *parthenos* (virgin) is used ... as a translation from *‘almah*.
(*Parthenos* is the equivalent of *b’thulah* in Hebrew (virgin), which is not used in the Hebrew text.)

The Interpreter’s Bible (1952)

Jesus' Name

From the scriptures:

To Joseph ... (from the Gospel of Matthew):

*"She will bear a son, and **you are to name him Jesus** ...*

*"All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and **they shall name him Emmanuel,**' which means, 'God is with us.'" (Matthew 1:21a, 22-23)*

To Mary ... (from the Gospel of Luke):

*"The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and **you will name him Jesus.**'" (Luke 1:30-31)*

- His name ...

Yeshua (Hebrew: יֵשׁוּעַ) bar Yosef ... (Joshua ... son of Joseph) ... meaning: "to deliver" ... "to rescue."

Note: Immanuel with an "I" is a transliteration of the original Hebrew word composed of "Immanu" (with us) and El (god), while Emmanuel with an "E" is a transliteration of the Greek "Emmanouel."

Compare

Jesus preached the coming of the Kingdom of God and how one had to prepare and act to enter into/ participate in the coming reign of God.

Paul preached salvation by grace ... faith ... through “church.”

In the Scriptures ... Jesus never uses the word ... **grace**.

Jesus never calls for the establishment of “**church**” ... an institution with an ecclesial hierarchy ... rite, ritual, sacraments, and required “beliefs.”

Jesus’ concept of “**faith**” involves “trust” ... faithfulness ... rather than belief in formal creedal statements ... a series of beliefs.

Trust in what? ... What he had to say ... his teachings ... and where they came from!

Trust God ... and him who he sent.

The Words/ The Concepts

- Sin/ Evil
- Salvation/ Redemption.
- Repentance
- Redeemer
- Grace/ Faith
- *Ekklesia*
- Worship
- Soul
- Eternal Life
- Satan

Words ... as treated within scriptures ...

Sin / Evil

missing the mark ...

or

intentional rejection of God ...

What is Sin ?

Sin

... missing the mark or deliberate rejection of God ...

The details of the purely theological definition are much contested.

“Sin cannot be explained, and the biblical authors do not try to explain it.”

The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible

Sin ... The Word

- In biblical Hebrew there are about 20 different words which denote ... are translated as ... “sin” ... or something similar to sin.
- “It may be inferred, therefore, that the ancient Israelites had more concepts expressing various nuances of sin than Western thought and theology. A study of the biblical concept of sin, therefore, cannot disregard the diversity of words denoting sin. These words must be examined in their context, i.e., in the formulas and literary units in which they occur.”
Jewish Virtual Library

“One author estimated that about fifty words in the OT should be included in a full study of its teachings about sin.”

The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible

Sin ... *hata'*

The most frequently used term is derived from the root *ht ... hata'* ... which appears over 450 times in the TaNaKh ... the Hebrew scriptures. It literally means “to miss” or “to fail.” (often referred to as an archery term)

In many early uses ... Torah ... Wisdom literature ... the word denotes “a lack of perfection in carrying out a duty.” This duty would be understood as keeping the Covenant. The Covenant incurred an obligation ... a binding contract ... and to not live up to the contract meant missing the mark ... or failure.

“The Hebrew language, in both biblical and postbiblical literature, has numerous names for the concept of sin, each with its own unique sense and shade of meaning.

Nevertheless, the concept of sin in and of itself is never fully developed or clarified in Judaism”

Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought

Sin ... Other Words

Other words ... other concepts ... often translated as “sin.”

- *râ`âh* ... often translated as “**evil**” or “**bad**” ... implies something that is contrary to God's nature.
- *râshâ`* ... often translated as “**wicked**” ... implies something that is morally wrong.
- *`âvôn* ... often translated as “**iniquity**” ... implies being perverse, crooked or twisted.
- *pêsha`* ... often translated as “**transgression**” ... implies rebellion.
- *‘âsham* ... often translated as “**guilty**” implies offense or trespass.
- *tâ`âh* ... **to vacillate**.
- *pâsha`* ... **to break away** (from just authority).
- *shâgâh* ... **to stray**.

The First Sin

“The first thing human beings do, in a world where ‘God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.’ (Gen 1:31), is commit a sin, by disobeying the one prohibition he had given them (Gen 2:17; 3:6).”

The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible

“And HaShem G-d commanded the man, saying: ‘Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it ...’” (Genesis 16-17a)

Interestingly ... The word(s) for sin is never used in the Adam and Eve story? Why?

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God ... God announced a series of consequences of their actions ...

God says: *“Because you have done this ...”*

The Word Sin ... First Use

The first time the word “sin” is used in scripture: God counsels Cain concerning the fact that his sacrifice was not acceptable ... he should try harder ... try again ... and he too could be successful. Sin is “lurking” ... but Cain has not yet sinned.

“If thou doest well, shall it not be lifted up? and if thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door; and unto thee is its desire, but thou mayest rule over it.”

(Genesis 4:7 JPS 1917)

“If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

(Genesis 4:7 NRSV)

Here ... God tells Cain that sin “is calling” ... but Cain himself can “rule over it” ... “master it.”

Is sin inevitable ?

Yetzer Ha-Ra

A Jewish perspective ...

People sin because as a part of their human nature there is an inclination toward “sin” ... although this inclination can be overcome. (*yetzer ha-ra* or “inclination to evil”)

All transgression and sin are the natural and inevitable consequence of man’s straying from God and His laws.

“For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

“... the biblical tradition knows that ‘there is no man who does not sin’ (I Kings 8:46). The psalmist describes his own sinfulness: ‘I was even born in iniquity, my mother conceived me in sin’ (Psalm 51:7) ... this only stresses the ineluctable [unable to be resisted ... inevitable] character of sin.”

Jewish Virtual Library

But ... remember God’s counseling of Cain ...

Sin ... An aspect of Human Nature ?

Everyone sins

“And HaShem 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)

“Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly; they have forsaken HaShem, they have contemned [treated with contempt] the Holy One of Israel, they are turned away backward.” (Isaiah 1:4)

... other rabbis of the Talmud don't want to blame human nature alone for the evils of mankind. God created mankind ... imperfect ... but basically ... good.

“Accordingly, when he commits evil, he acts under certain impulses not exactly identical with his own natural self.” Solomon Schechter (d 1915)

Involuntary Sin ?

Sin ... “Nobody can escape from it, as the sin can also be involuntary or proceed from ignorance. A man is responsible for all his actions.”

Jewish Virtual Library

“And if any one sin, and do any of the things which HaShem hath commanded not to be done, though he know it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity.” (Leviticus 5:17 JPS 1917)

“If any of you sin without knowing it, doing any of the things that by the Lord's commandments ought not to be done, you have incurred guilt, and are subject to punishment.” (Leviticus 5:17 NRSV)

Involuntary sin ?? ... what about intent ... culpability ??

“Yet this view seems inconsistent with another thesis that commands very wide support – the thesis, namely, that we are ethically accountable only for voluntary actions or omissions.”

Robert Adams ... philosopher

Punishment for Sin

Stereotyped formulas say that “each man shall die because of his sin” or “because of his transgression.” The sinner must indeed “bear his sin.”

“The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin.” (Deuteronomy 24:16 ... quoted in II Kings 14:6 & Ezekiel 18:20)

“When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby.” (Ezekiel 33:8)

Again ... after Adam and Eve disobey God ... *“Because you have done this ...”*
... *“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”* (Genesis 3:19)

According to scripture ... death is a punishment for ... disobedience (sin).

Sinlessness

“If a man tells you that had Adam not sinned and eaten of the forbidden tree, he would have lived for ever, answer him that actually happened with Elijah.”

Leviticus Rabbah (homiletic midrash)

“And it came to pass, as they [Elijah and Elisha] still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them both assunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” (2 Kings 2:11)

Exile ... as Punishment

“Wherefore hath HaShem pronounced all this great evil against us? or what is our iniquity? or what is our sin that we have committed against HaShem our G-d?’ then shalt thou say unto them:

‘Because your fathers have forsaken Me, saith HaShem, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken Me, and have not kept My law;

and ye have done worse than your fathers; for, behold, ye walk every one after the stubbornness of his evil heart, so that ye hearken not unto Me;

therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye have not known, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; forasmuch as I will show you no favour.” (Jeremiah 16:10b-13)

- During the times of the prophets the two great transgressions against God were considered to be idolatry (placing anything before awe of God) and social injustice (in violation of the Covenant Law). Punishment involves loss of the Covenant “Home”... the Covenant Promise, i.e., exile.

Sin

Modern Jewish Thought (*Moment* magazine)

- **Reconstructionist:** Sin ... “missing the mark” implies ... “not damnation for falling short, just that we must try harder next time. And perhaps Yom Kippur’s chest-beating is less self-flagellation than invitation – a knock on our heart’s door, a gentle entreaty for self-improvement.”
- **Reform:** “... we believe that we are born absent of sin. In exercising free will and making decisions, we set the direction for our lives.”
- **Conservative:** “... sin ... is the result of being human. People are born with a potential, a *yetzer*. Our challenge in life is to channel our *yetzer* so that we make good choices and do good.”
- **Modern Orthodox:** “The truly righteous acknowledge when they have sinned, then take steps to correct their actions. ... That is why the Talmud says that a person who repents can reach a higher level than a person who has never sinned.”

Sin

- **Orthodox:** “... people subconsciously infer that sin is a crime against G-d ...”
“... the Jewish notion of the absolute oneness of G-d doesn't leave room for it. God doesn't need our service, nor is he ultimately injured by our misdeeds. This makes Jews conscious of the fact that all sins – things we're not supposed to do – and mitzvot – things we are supposed to do – ultimately affect man and man alone.”

Sin does not sever an individual's relationship with God ... it is an impediment to that relationship ... and must be “worked through” ... by repentance and reform.

Sin is an aspect of the human condition.

Sin can be used as a call to reform ... repentance ... betterment ...

Saved from Sin

In Christianity ... its all about “sin.”

Jesus is savior ... redeemer ...

- “freedom secured by payment of a price” ... payment for what? ... sin.

Following Jesus is about atonement ... salvation ...

- “The word ‘atonement’ is one of the few theological terms which derive basically from Anglo-Saxon. It means ‘a making at one’, and points to a process of bringing those who are estranged into a unity.”

The New Bible Dictionary

However ...

“‘Savior’ and ‘deliverer’ seem not to be terms used by Jesus or even of him till the christological assertions after Easter.”

“More pertinent to the ‘historical Jesus’ may be the declaration made often at the end of a miracle story, which could be translated, ‘Your faith has saved you’ ... ‘made you whole’ ... ‘of the sense of wholeness of life.’”

The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible

Sin

Just as in the Hebrew scriptures, in the Christian scriptures there are a number of words ... in Greek ... that can be/ have been translated into English as sin ... or some version of the concept of sin.

In the Gospels of the Christian scripture, the most common Greek form is ... *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία) ... and its variants ... used 55x. (Mark 8x, Matthew 10x, Luke 15x, John 22x) ... (over 250x in the entire Christian scriptures)

Hamartia etymologically comes from the idea “falling short” ... very similar to the Hebrew ... *hata'* ... which appears over 450 times in the TaNaKh ... and literally means “to miss” or “to fail.” (often referred to as an archery term)

Other Words

Other words ... other concepts ...

There are many other words that are used in the Christian scriptures that denote a concept of “sin” ...

- *adikia, adikos* ... often translated as ... **unrighteousness, iniquity** ... literally means “not right” and denotes injustice (wrongdoing between individuals).
- *paraptoma* ... often translated as ... **trespass** ... literally means ... “to fall aside” and refers to a false step, blunder ... lapse or deviation.
“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

“It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.” (Romans 4:24b-25)

Other Words

- *anomia* ... often translated as ... **lawlessness** ... literally means “no law.”
- *parabasis* ... often translated as ... **transgression** ... literally means “to cross” by “foot” ... or to cross the line ... meaning to break a specific law.
- *asebeia* ... often translated as ... **ungodliness** ... literally means “no worship” and denotes rebellion against God.
- *opheilema* ... translated as ... **debt** ... something owed ... a metaphor for “sin.”
- *parakoe, apeitheia* ... often translated as ... **disobedience** ... means more literally “to hear” “aside” ... a refusal to hear (and obey).
- *agnoema* ... often translated as ... **ignorance** or **error**.
- *amomos, hettema, memphomai, aition, elencho* ... numerous Greek words translated as ... **fault**.

Jesus ... concerning sin

Words of Jesus from the Gospels ...

- Universality of sin ...

Woman caught in the act of adultery.

“When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let anyone among you who is without sin [anamartetos] be the first to throw a stone at her.’” (John 8:7)

“Go your way, and from now on do not sin [hamartane] again.” (John 8:11)

- Need for repentance ...

Jesus criticized for eating with sinners.

“Jesus answered, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners [harmartolous] to repentance.’” (Luke 5:31-32)

anamartetos ... negative of harmatano

Jesus ... concerning sin

- Forgiveness of sins ...

Woman anoints Jesus in the house of a Pharisee.

“Therefore, I tell you, her sins [hamartiai], which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.’ Then he said to her, ‘Your sins [hamartiai] are forgiven.’” (Luke 7:47-48)

- Unforgiveable sin ...

Jesus accused of being possessed by demons.

*“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins [hamartemata] and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, **but is guilty of an eternal sin** [hamartematos] ...”* (Mark 3:28-29)

- *“but is in danger of eternal damnation [aioniou kriseos] ...”* (KJV)
 - *aioniou kriseos* ... of eternal judging ... guilt

But ... what is sin ?

Sin is described in the Bible as transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4) and rebellion against God (Deuteronomy 9:7; Joshua 1:18). Got Questions.org

- *“... sin is lawlessness.”* (1 John 3:4b)
- *“Whosoever he be that shall rebel against thy commandment, and shall not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death; only be strong and of good courage.”* (Joshua 1:18)

“But the definition of sin is not to be derived simply from the terms used in Scripture to denote it.” The New Bible Dictionary

“Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is a failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man ...”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed, para 1849

Oxford Languages (dictionary): “an offense against religious or moral law”; “a transgression of the law of God”; “a vitiated [impaired/ destroyed] state of human nature in which the self is estranged from God.”

Is anyone without sin ?

“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.” (James 2:10)

“Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.”

- sins of omission (James 4:17)

“Whoever says, ‘I have come to know him,’ but does not obey his commandments, is a liar ...” (1 John 2:4)

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:8-10)

- Sin as ultimate ... deadly ...

Is anyone without sin ?

“No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.” (1 John 3:6)

“Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.” (1 John 3:9)

“1 John implies that the person who sins is not really a Christian.”

“The emphasis on the inherent sinlessness of the Christian appears to stand in sharp contrast to the earlier claim that one should not say, ‘We have no sin.’”

The New Jerome Bible Commentary

Sin ... a flaw

Augustine (d 430) discerns that the root of his sin is concupiscence (a tendency toward evil), or disordered desire. He rejected the idea that evil exists in itself, instead regarding it as a corruption of goodness, caused by humanity's abuse of free will.

“Sin is not only missing God’s mark; it is an inner reality, a warp in human nature, and a malignant power that holds each individual in an unbreakable grip.”
Zondervan Expository Dictionary of Bible Words

Sin ... not an individual action ... but a flaw in human nature ...

- Augustine thought that when a person sins ... that person actually sins against his own nature (as God created it).

But ... God created mankind’s human nature ...

But ... don’t blame sin on human “free will” ... God created that too!

Thoughts on Sin

“There is a great deal of confusion about sin these days, and it’s important that we reflect on what we mean when we use this word. Sin is described in a number of ways in the Scriptures: It is seen as disobedience, our failure to keep God’s laws. It is connected with human pride, our tendency to be self-centered and self-absorbed. It is a condition of separation and estrangement from God, the natural result of our choosing evil over good. It is marked by unfaithfulness and idolatry, the fruit of centering our lives on ourselves or on the things of the world. All of these words describe aspects of our condition.”

“The Scriptures are clear that we have *all* fallen short of the glory for which God created us.”

Br. David Vryhof ... Society of St John the Evangelist

So ... what is sin ?

“Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.” (James 4:17)

“... sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4b)

“All wrongdoing is sin ...” (1 John 5:17a)

“... whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” (Romans 14:23b)

- nebulous ... hazy, vague, confused

But ... its all about sin

In Christianity, however, it seems to be all about sin ... even though we can't put an exact definition on what sin is ...

“Burdened by sin, we also have no hope of eternal life with God in heaven. But when we come to Christ and trust Him as our Savior and Lord, God forgives us and cleanses us of all our sins, and we're no longer under sin's sentence of death. In other words, we have been saved from sin's penalty.”

Billy Graham (d 2018)

“... an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’” (Matthew 1:20b-21)

“The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”

(John 1:29)

But ... what does it mean to be saved?

Sin and The Law

Is there Sin without Law ?

Is morality absolute ?

Is moral law absolute?

... is something wrong ... or sinful ... because God said it is ... or because it is at an absolute, essential or intrinsic [basic nature or character] level of understanding?

Are morals discovered or invented?

Do moral values exist independently of us or are they entirely a product of the human mind?

Divine Will or social consensus?

Moral absolutism is the view that moral values exist, are real and can be known, or at the very least that there are some types of human behavior which are, in themselves or by their very nature, always right or wrong.

Moral Relativism represents the view that the truth or falsity of moral judgments, or their justification, is not absolute or universal, but is relative to the traditions, convictions, or practices of a group of persons.

Morality

Is morality objective or relative?

- The medieval philosopher, William of Ockham (d 1347), believed that moral principles exist in God's mind ... and these have been revealed to us.
- Secular philosophers deny the objective status of moral values. Moral values are human inventions.
 - *Individual relativism* ... people develop their own moral standards.
 - *Cultural relativism* ... moral standards are grounded in the approval of the society.

These values can (and do) change over time ... slavery, homosexuality, individual rights, free thought ...

The Euthyphro dilemma

Originally presented in Plato's (d 4th cent BCE) dialogues ... rephrased by Gottfried Leibniz (d 1716).

“It is generally agreed that whatever God wills is good and just. But there remains the question whether it is good and just **because God wills it** or whether God wills it **because it is good and just**; in other words, whether justice and Goodness are arbitrary or whether they belong to the necessary and eternal truths about the nature of things.”

- Rationalism ... that which is right is commanded by God because it is right.
 - Problem ... If there are moral standards independent of God's will, then there is something over which God is not sovereign. God is bound by the laws of morality instead of being their establisher.
- Divine Command Theory ... that which is right is right because it is willed and commanded by God.
 - Problem ... Anything could become good, and anything could become bad, merely upon God's will and command.

Solution: God is identical to the ultimate standard for goodness.

Sin and Covenant

Sin ... without law ... “It is not the external nature of the act that makes it sinful. In biblical thought, the relation that creates the right to God’s protection also creates the sin. There would be no sin if there were no covenantal law. The sinner is one who has failed in his relation to God, insofar as he has not fulfilled his obligation to God. In other words, it is a “sin” to violate, or to break, the Covenant.”

Jewish Virtual Library

mitzvah ... refers to a commandment commanded by God to be performed as a religious duty.

Sin: “... where positive commandments are concerned it consists of abstention and where negative commandments are concerned it consists of action. In every case, that is to say, it is conceived as the negation of something else, and not as an independent entity in its own right.”

Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought

Sin and Law/ Commandments

Law ... commandments ... sin ...

Jesus ...

“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.” (John 15:22)

Paul ...

“... if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ ... Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.”

(Romans 7:7-12)

“Reformed” Thinking

Luther’s view of sin reflects the variety of biblical terms used to describe sinfulness

“The essence of sin or unrighteousness for him (original sin) lies in lack of trust in God, which corrupts all of human nature. The desires turned against God, concupiscence, permeate human thinking and remain as sin after baptism. Sin is inherited from Adam and Eve and consists of each person’s doubt of God’s Word.”
The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther’s Theology

- The beginning of Luther’s doctrine of sin is tied to his discovery of Augustine’s anti-Pelagian writings.
- “Strange, though I am saved from sin, I am not saved from sinning.”

“The Christian or baptized man cannot, even if he would, lose his soul by any sins however great, unless he refuses to believe; for no sins whatever can condemn him, but unbelief alone.”

Martin Luther ... *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*

Belief ... more important than continued sinning.

Continuing Sinfulness

“No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.” (1 John 3:6)

“Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.” (1 John 3:9)

“1 John implies that the person who sins is not really a Christian.”

The New Jerome Bible Commentary

Paul ... “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.” (Romans 7:18-20)

- *“... Paul doesn't say ‘I was’ in the past tense, but ‘I practice the very evil that I do not want,’ in the present. I'm an active sinner in fact, not in theory.”*
- *Martin Luther ... “The saints in being righteous are at the same time sinners ...” (Romans Commentary)*

What happened to sin ?

In Christianity it seems to have always been about sin.

“The doctrine of sin is central to the Christian faith, since its basic message is about redemption in Christ.”

Karl Rahner ... Roman Catholic Theologian (d 1984)

- *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23)

But ...

- Jesus’ efficacious sacrifice is so great that ultimately **all** are saved ... Universal Restoration. (Origen)
- *“No one who abides in him sins ...”* (John)
 - *“I practice the very evil that I do not want ...”* (Paul)
 - *“The saints in being righteous are at the same time sinners ...”* (Martin Luther)
- *“The question is not whether you have faith or not; the question is if you believe in the right thing.”* Lutheran Reformation.org

Reformed Theology

Does reformed theology make too little of sin?

To Luther sin, guilt, and sin's consequences have all been taken care of ... "Sin on, boldly ..."

The dichotomy: "For St. John says, 1 John 3:9: Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, ... and he cannot sin. And yet it is also the truth when the same St. John says, 1:8: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

"Things you may have forgotten you believed in" ... Journal of Lutheran Liturgy

"The question is not whether you have faith or not; the question is if you believe in the right thing. You can have all the sincerely held beliefs you want, but are they true? You can have the 'strongest' faith a person could possibly have, but if the thing you believe in is uncertain at best or false at worse, then your faith is worthless. It is not faith that saves, but faith in Christ."

Martin Luther writes: "Faith is a vital, deliberate trust in God's grace ..."

Lutheran Reformation.org

Question

Come as you are (and be baptized) ... believe the right things ... your sins will be forgiven ... have been forgiven ... you are justified ... you have been saved ...

but what about transformation ... being a new creation ... living in the spirit ... ?

“The idea that a person could “trust in Jesus Christ” for salvation and then go on living just as he/she lived before, is absolutely foreign to the Bible.”

Got Questions

Evil

Much worse than sin

Evil vs Sin

“If sin can be described as “missing the mark” how do we classify the moral significance of truly horrific actions/ occurrences?

It seems that we cannot capture the moral significance of these actions and their perpetrators by calling them ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’ or even ‘very very wrong’ or ‘very very bad.’ We need the concept of evil.”

“The narrow concept of evil involves moral condemnation. It is appropriately ascribed only to moral agents and their actions. For example, if only human beings are moral agents, then only human beings can perform evil actions. Evil in this narrower sense is more often meant when the term ‘evil’ is used in contemporary contexts.”

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

- the evildoer intends there to be significant harm
- evil involves ... intent

Evil Things ... Places ?

However, in the Hebrew scriptures the word oftentimes translated as evil is regularly applied to objects that lack moral agency and cannot, according to the above definition, be considered evil.

“And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.” (Numbers 20:5)

- evil as ... unproductive ... “good for nothing”

“And HaShem will take away from thee all sickness; and He will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee, but will lay them upon all them that hate thee.” (Deuteronomy 7:15)

- God will use “evil diseases” against Israel’s enemies.

Evil vs Sin

In Hebrew: רע ... *ra'* ... bad, evil, adversity, affliction.

- Used over 600x in the Hebrew scriptures

From *ra'a'* ... break to pieces, to spoil, good for nothing.

“And the serpent said unto the woman: ‘Ye shall not surely die; for G-d doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as G-d, knowing good and evil.’” (Genesis 3:5)

“And HaShem 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. And it repented HaShem that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.” (Genesis 5:5-6)

- In modern usage ... intentional, superlative wickedness ...

Evil ... from God ?

“Now the spirit of HaShem had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from HaShem terrified him. And Saul's servants said unto him: ‘Behold now, an evil spirit from G-d terrifieth thee.’” (1 Samuel 16:14-15)

- An apologetic interpretation: Saul struggled deeply with his inner self, often losing the fight with his own evil or distressing spirit ... apathy, depression, raging temper, changed personality, and paranoia.

Remember:

*“I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and **create evil**; I am HaShem, that doeth all these things.” (Isaiah 45:7, JPS 1917)*

*“I form light and create darkness, I make weal and **create woe** - I the LORD do all these things.” (Isaiah 45:7, JPS 1985)*

Meanings

According to Strong's Concordance the KJV translates ... *ra'* ... (663 uses)

evil (442x),

wickedness (59x),

wicked (25x),

mischief (21x),

hurt (20x),

bad (13x),

trouble (10x),

sore (9x),

affliction (6x),

ill (5x),

adversity (4x),

ill favoured (3x),

harm (3x),

naught (3x),

noisome (offensive smell) (2x),

grievous (2x),

sad (2x),

miscellaneous (34x)

Concept of Evil

In Judaism ... the Talmud states that evil desires are not sinful ... but turning these desires into actions is ... “Every person turns to the way he desires ...”

Human beings have the power for good or evil.

- *Yetzer-tov* ... inclination toward good.
- *Yetzer ha-ra* ... inclination toward evil.

If God created the urge-to-evil ... than that urge in and of itself cannot be evil. Thus ... temptation is not the ultimate problem.

“For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.”
(Ecclesiastes 7:20)

From the Talmud ...

- “The rabbis taught that we should not set an opportunity for sin before an honest man much less before a crook; it is like putting fire next to straw.”
- “The greater the man, the greater the urge-to-evil.”

Temptation ... internal ... external ... both.

Christian Perspectives

The Christian scripture has a more fully developed “outside source” for sin and evil, i.e., Satan ... but the language of the scripture also points to a serious lack of discipline ... and control ... on the part of humankind.

- From Paul ... *“Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.”* (Galatians 5:16-17)

In later Christian understanding ... even with the development of Satan as a personification of evil ... blame was still placed on humankind for sin and evil.

- Augustine (d 430) taught that man was free ... but free to sin ... because of the Fall ... a result of concupiscence ... a tendency toward evil.
 - “A man’s free will avails for nothing except to sin.”
- John Calvin (d 1564) ... There is no external force or coercion that makes man sin, he is motivated by his own passions.

From the Greek ...

A number of words in biblical Greek are translated into English as ... evil: *kakos* (κακός), *poneros* (πονηρός), *sapros* (σαπρός), *phaulos* (φαῦλος).

“And he [Jesus] said, ‘It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil (kakoi) intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil (ponera) things come from within, and they defile a person.’” (Mark 7:20-23)

kakos: intrinsically worthless

poneros: evil ... in effect or influence ... bringing peril

sapros: rotten, putrefied

phaulos: mean, worthless, of no account

The *kakos* may be content to perish in his own corruption but the *poneros* is not content unless he is corrupting others as well and drawing them into the same destruction.

The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible

From the Greek ...

phaulos: mean, worthless, of no account

“For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.” (John 3:20)

sapros: rotten, putrefied

(does not appear within the Gospels)

“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.”

(Ephesians 4:29)

Evil

Evil, in a traditional, classical sense, is defined by what it is not - the opposite or absence of good. It can be an extremely broad concept ...

Evil doesn't exist ... in and of itself ... it is the absence of good.

Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas ...

Augustine (d 430) ... “Where there is evil, there is a corresponding diminution of the good. As long, then, as a thing is being corrupted, there is good in it of which it is being deprived ... If, however, the corruption comes to be total and entire, there is no good left either because it is no longer an entity at all.”

(Enchiridion ... Manual)

Boethius (d 524) ... evil has no substance and does not exist.

Aquinas (d 1274) ... Man is created with a defect ... by God. But ... it is man acting upon that defect, through misguided free-will, that results in sin.

Therefore, sin is not a direct result of God's created order.

Categories of Evil

“Evil in the broad sense has been divided into two categories: natural evil and moral evil.

Natural evils are bad states of affairs which do not result from the intentions or negligence of moral agents. Hurricanes and toothaches are examples of natural evils.

By contrast, moral evils do result from the intentions or negligence of moral agents. Murder and lying are examples of moral evils.”

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Personal note: I reject the idea that there is such a category as “natural evil.” Evil has an *intent* ... that’s exactly what makes it “evil”, therefore, there certainly are natural and personal tragedies (floods and premature deaths) but these cannot be considered “evil.”

Most theorists writing about evil believe that evil action requires a certain sort of motivation.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Pain and Suffering

For those who do accept the concept of “natural evil”, pain is considered to be one of those evils.

But ... pain is more than simply ... a lack of pleasure.

“... it seems that we cannot equate the evil of pain with the privation of pleasure or some other feeling. Pain is a distinct phenomenological experience which is positively bad and not merely not good.

Similarly, a sadistic torturer is not just not as good as she could be. She is not simply lacking in kindness or compassion. She desires her victims’ suffering for pleasure. These are qualities she has, not qualities she lacks, and they are positively bad and not merely lacking in goodness.”

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

- Suffering (pain) ... physical or psychological ... is neither sin, nor evil.
 - It “is a distinct phenomenological experience which is positively bad and not merely not good.” It has no “intent” to harm.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

A Distinction

Sin ... evil ... suffering ... are each different.

Evil results from intent.

Salvation/ Redemption

From what ... ?

To what ... ?

God ... as Savior

“... there is no G-d else beside Me, *a just G-d and a Saviour*; there is none beside Me. Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am G-d, and there is none else.” (Isaiah 45:21b-22, JPS 1917)

- “... *Who foretells truly and grants success.*” (Isaiah 45:21b-22, JPS 1985)
- ַּיְשׁוּעַ ... (*yasa* ... to deliver, go forth)

“... God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3b-4)

- $\Sigma\omega\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$... (*soter* ... deliverer... oftentimes appears as a title)

God saves ...

In Judaism ... God saves his people from exile ... oppression ... so that they can be what they were always meant to be ... as Chosen ... a light to the world.

In Christianity ... God provides the opportunity for people to be saved from effects of their sins by the efficacious sacrifice of Jesus ... delivered from the punishment for sin - eternal death.

Salvation/ Redemption

Within Judaism, salvation has been primarily conceived of in terms of the destiny of Israel as the elect people of God. It was not until the 2nd century BCE that there arose a belief in an afterlife, for which the dead would be resurrected and undergo divine judgment. Before that time, the individual had to be content that his posterity would continue within the holy nation.

Encyclopedia Britannica

Redemption is an ongoing process ...

- “A people in despair, broken and in exile, elicits from its God the mercy and promise ...”
- “... repositioning of himself in the direction of being; repentance and turning is in God’s ordering of things a reevaluation of the human condition of being in the world.”
- “Redemption addresses human hope in a different manner than through reward and punishment ...”

The people strive to be what they were meant to be from the beginning ... in the image and likeness of God.

Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought

Salvation

yeshu'ah ... יְשׁוּעָה ... to be open wide or free ... help, deliverance, salvation.

The context of this word throughout the Hebrew scriptures is to rescue someone from an enemy, danger, death ... or something to be feared.

*“I wait for Thy **salvation**, O L-rd.”* (Genesis 49:18)

*“And Moses said unto the people: ‘Fear ye not, stand still, and see the **salvation** of HaShem, which He will work for you to-day; for whereas ye have seen the Egyptians to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.’”* (Exodus 14:13)

*“Oh that the **salvation** of Israel were come out of Zion! When HaShem turneth the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.”* (Psalm 14:7)

*“I will give thanks unto Thee, O HaShem; for though Thou was angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me. Behold, G-d is my **salvation**; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for GOD HaShem is my strength and song; and He is become my **salvation**.’ Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of **salvation**.”* (Isaiah 12:1b-3)

Salvation/ Redemption

Salvation = redemption = **restoration**

In traditional ... scriptural ... Judaism ... “salvation is closely related to the idea of **redemption, a saving from the states or circumstances that destroy the value of human existence.**” Salvation ... is social ... just and righteous.

Restoration establishes the circumstances to exist for the People Israel to fulfill their mission of Covenanted Relationship ... to be the “first fruit” ... “first light” of the just and righteous society called for by the prophets ... and therefore God ... in the scriptures. Examples:

Ezekiel (6th cent BCE): an end to the Babylonian captivity ... and a restoration of the Jewish Kingdom ... Jerusalem ... and the Temple.

Maimonides (d 1204): the Jewish people will be free to involve themselves in Torah and its wisdom, without anyone to oppress or disturb them.

Even in early post-biblical understanding ... there is no concept of eternal reward or punishment ... there is the hope of restoration in this world.

Redemption = Restoration

In contemporary Judaism, redemption (Hebrew: גְּאוּלָּה *ge'ulah*), refers to God redeeming the people of Israel from their various exiles. This includes the final redemption from the present exile.

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great horn shall be blown; and they shall come that were lost in the land of Assyria, and they that were dispersed in the land of Egypt; and they shall worship HaShem in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 27:13)

“And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the habitable places of the country.”

“I will seek that which was lost, and will bring back that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick; and the fat and the strong I will destroy, I will feed them in justice.”

(Ezekiel 34:13 & 16)

Your Redeemer

The term “Your Redeemer” is used fourteen times in the book of Isaiah alone.

- *ga'al* ... גאָל

Next of kin, and, hence, redeemer. Owing to the solidarity of the family and the clan in ancient Israel, any duty which a man could not perform by himself had to be taken up by his next of kin. Any rights possessed by a man which lapsed through his inability to perform the duties attached to such rights, could be and should be resumed by the next of kin. (duties of relationship)

- *ga'al* appears 99x in Hebrew scriptures with 18 different translations.
- avenger ... kinsman ...

“But now thus saith HaShem that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art Mine.” (Isaiah 43:1)

“Thus saith HaShem, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer HaShem of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last, and beside Me there is no G-d.” (Isaiah 44:6)

Transgressions ... forgiven

“Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for thou art My servant; I have formed thee, thou art Mine own servant; O Israel, thou shouldest not forget Me.

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins; return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens, for HaShem hath done it; shout, ye lowest parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for HaShem hath redeemed Jacob, and doth glorify Himself in Israel.

Thus saith HaShem, thy Redeemer, and He that formed thee from the womb: I am HaShem, that maketh all things; that stretched forth the heavens alone; that spread abroad the earth by Myself; That frustrateth the tokens of the imposters, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; That confirmeth the word of His servant, and performeth the counsel of His messengers; that saith of Jerusalem: ‘She shall be inhabited’; and of the cities of Judah: ‘They shall be built, and I will raise up the waste places thereof ...’”

(Isaiah 44:21-26)

- The “people Israel” are redeemed ... end of Babylonian exile ... restoration of Jerusalem.

Salvation

From a Christian perspective ...

Salvation ... preservation or deliverance from harm, ruin, or loss.

“The very notion of “salvation” rests on the assumption that there is *something wrong* that needs to be put right; if all is well, there is no need for a savior.”

“For most Christians, the answer to that question is “sin.” It is sin, they would say, that has caused us to go wrong; it is because of sin that we are lost.”

Br. David Vryhof ... Society of St John the Evangelist

No ... sin did not “cause us to go wrong” ... because humankind “went wrong” there is sin. Sin is not the cause ... it is the effect ... the result.

“For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery ... ” (Mark 7:21-22a)

Salvation ... the word

The Oxford English Dictionary defines salvation as “**saving of the soul from sin and its consequences.**”

There is a serious problem with this definition ... based upon scripture.

- **Soul** ... is a Greek philosophical concept ... not expounded upon in scripture ... Hebrew or Christian.
- **Sin** ... as we have seen ... has many definitions ... widely varying in degree ... none universally agreed upon.

The Greek word salvation (*soteria* ... σωτηρία) never appears in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew ...

The word appears 4x in the Gospel of Luke and once in the Gospel of John ...

But the word appears frequently in the Epistles (28x) ... and in the Acts of the Apostles (5x).

In the Gospels ... Jesus uses the word only twice ...

Salvation ... from the Jews

Jesus uses the word “salvation” only twice ...

To the tax collector Zacchaeus ... after his repentance ...

“Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.” (Luke 19:9)

To the Samaritan woman ... at the well ...

“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.” (John 4:22)

In both cases, Jesus ties “salvation” to “Jewishness.”

- Jesus validates (his own) “Jewishness.” Just as with the message of the prophets ... if practiced correctly ... carrying out the will and intent of God ... through the Covenant ... will result in the people Israel being the light to the world bringing the world to God.

Salvation ... and the others

“Salvation: Another key Christian doctrine is salvation - the core Christian claim is that ‘Jesus Saves’ - but what, exactly, that means continues to be debated. One of the most pressing aspects of a Christian understanding of salvation is how it relates to the way Christians view other religious traditions. The traditional Christian view regarding salvation has been that outside the Christian church, there is no salvation. This idea drove the missionary practices of the church for centuries - and still drives many different churches today: there was a strong impetus to convert people to Christianity so that they would go to heaven after they died.

However, in the 21st century, this understanding of salvation has been increasingly challenged, and the possibility of other options has been raised, particularly the possibility of universal salvation. Many people assume that this is a modern idea, brought about by engagement with a more liberal, secular society, but this doctrine actually has a long history in the Christian tradition.”

Gettysburg College ... World Religions 101

Saved from Sin

A developing (Johannine) concept ...

“... and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7b)

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:1-2)

“God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”
(1 John 4:9-10)

- What does it mean to be “saved from sin?”
- *“atoning sacrifice ... for the sins of the whole world.”* ... Universal Restoration?
- *“so that we might live through him”* ... fullness of life ... here ... now?

Saved from Sin

“Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

*You know that **he was revealed to take away sins**, and in him there is no sin.*

No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.

*Little children, let no one deceive you. **Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.***

Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

***Those who have been born of God do not sin**, because God's seed abides in them; **they cannot sin**, because they have been born of God.*

The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” (1 John 3:4-11)

No more Sin

From the first letter of John ...

*“No one who abides in him sins;
no one who sins has either seen him or known him.”*

“Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.”

“Those who have been born of God do not sin ... they cannot sin ...”

“But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous ...”

Jesus' Commandments

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.” (John 15:10)

“You are my friends **if** you do what I command you.” (John 15:14)

John ... Gospel and letters ... clearly outside the “mainstream” of developing Christianity.

Universal Restoration

Origen of Alexandria (185-254) ... speculative theologian.

“We think that the goodness of God, through the mediation of Christ, will bring all creatures to one and the same end.” ... Universal Restoration

- If no one deserves to be saved ... then everyone will be saved.

When confronted with the “ultimate truth,” i.e., God ... man, as an intellect, will always choose the good ... God. (perhaps ... even after death)

To not choose the good is not so much sinful as it is ignorant.

Ultimately, the “saved” do not rejoice in heaven while the damned suffer in hell ... all souls return to a reunion with God.

Jerome (d 420) ...

On Universal Restoration ... “the same for Gabriel as for the devil, for Paul as for Caiaphas, for virgins as for prostitutes, (these) were poisonous heresies.”

Redemption

The concept of *redemption*, evokes the imagery of the marketplace. Redemption signifies a transaction where some item or person is exchanged for payment.

The words redeem and redemption appear only in the Gospel of Luke and never in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and John ...

Jesus uses the word (*apolytrosis* ... ἀπολύτρωσις ... meaning “ransom in full” ... translated as redemption) only once.

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:25-28)

The Eschaton

An interpretation ...

- The Gospel of Luke was written ~85 CE.
- The Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE.
- In this “apocalyptic” (catastrophic occurrence) Luke has Jesus speak about the trauma of the destruction of Jerusalem ... but warns that even worse things are going to occur.

“When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, ‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’” (Luke 21:5-6)

When those worse things begin to happen ... the judgment will be near. But ... to those who have remained faithful in their time of trial ... trusting in Jesus and the Gospel ... redemption will be at hand.

“This will give you an opportunity to testify. ... for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.”

(Luke 21:13 & 15)

The Eschaton

In times of trouble ... keep the faith ... *“my words will not pass away.”*

Redemption

Paul uses the imagery of redemption and declares that the price of our redemption was the blood of Christ, representing the divine life:

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses ...” (Ephesians 1:7)

“... since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ...” (Romans 3:23-24)

“... so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption ...” (1 Corinthians 1:29-30)

“He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13-14)

Justification

The concept of *justification* is an image drawn from a court of law. To be justified is to be declared innocent by the judge; it is the state of having been acquitted and declared “not guilty.”

Greek: *dikaiosyne* ... δικαιοσύνη (also translated as “righteousness”).

This word is not used by Jesus ... does not appear in any of the Gospels ... and is only found in the Epistles: Romans 4x ... 2 Corinthians 1x ... Galatians 1x.

“It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.” (Romans 4:24-25)

- *“believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead”* ... again, a distinction. God raised Jesus from the dead ... and this God is the one to be believed in.
- Jesus ... used by ... God.
- *“death for our trespasses”* ... Jesus died for humankind’s sins.
- *“raised for our justification”* ... how does resurrection ... justify?

Justification/ Salvation

“... salvation or ‘justification’ is brought about by faith, or, more precisely, by faith in Christ’s resurrection with its message that death has been defeated.”

Denis Moreau ... University of Nantes

where ... exactly does this understanding come from?

Grace

God's (special) favor

Grace ?

God's grace is usually defined as ... **undeserved favor**.

Grace cannot be earned; it is something that is freely given.

Reformed Theology ... “... the saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom he has determined to save (the elect) and ... overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to faith in Christ.”

But wait ... I thought that God loved every individual equally ?

Doesn't that imply that everyone would receive grace equally ?

- “... God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3b-4)
- “... *there is no G-d else beside Me, a just G-d and a Saviour; there is none beside Me. Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am G-d, and there is none else.*” (Isaiah 45:21b-22)

“... that unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.”

(Isaiah 45:23b)

From the Hebrew

יָן (Hebrew ... *chane, chen*) ... favour, kindness, grace, charm, preciousness ...

First use: *“And HaShem said: ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and creeping thing, and fowl of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them.’ But Noah found **grace in the eyes of HaShem.**”* (Genesis 6:7-8)

Abraham to the three strangers ... *“My lord, if now I have found **favour in thy sight**, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant. Let now a little water be fetched, and wash your feet, and recline yourselves under the tree.”*

(Genesis 18:3-4)

Jacob to Esau ... *“And Jacob said: ‘Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found **favour in thy sight**, then receive my present at my hand ...’”* (Genesis 33:10a)

Moses to God ... *“Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found **grace in Thy sight**, show me now Thy ways, that I may know Thee, to the end that I may **find grace in Thy sight**; and consider that this nation is Thy people.”* (Exodus 33:13)

Favor ... in thy sight

*“... if now I have found **favour** in thy sight ...”*

variants ...

- *“in the eyes of HaShem.”*
- *‘in your eyes’*

This phrase, or its variants, appears 26x in the Hebrew scriptures ... 18x in the Torah alone.

Moses speaking to God:

*“‘For wherein now shall it be known that I have found **grace** in Thy sight, I and Thy people? is it not in that Thou goest with us, so that we are distinguished, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth?’ And HaShem said unto Moses: ‘I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken, for thou hast found **grace** in My sight, and I know thee by name.’ And he said: ‘Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory.’” (Exodus 33:16-18)*

From the Hebrew

The word ... **חַנּוּן** (*chane*) ... comes from a root meaning ... be gracious, have mercy, to make lovely ...

Even within the Hebrew scriptures the term is usually used in a secular (non-theological) sense ... treating human-to-human relations.

In a more contemporary Jewish understanding the term is associated with the relations of human to human ... and therefore is more of a Covenant term than a theological term (God to human).

- “... an ethics that begins not with my rights, but with the other’s needs ...”
- “... do justice ... practice lovingkindness ...” (Micah)
- Practice the ways of God ... and these ways are loving-kindness (*hesed*), charity (*tzedakah*), and righteousness (*mishpat*).
- Loving-kindness ... the exercise of beneficence toward one who has no right at all to claim this from you ... because God is “abundant in *hesed*.”

No single meaning

In the Hebrew scriptures (TaNaKh), the word **חַנּוּן** (*chane*) is used in a number of dissimilar contexts.

Difficult passages ...

*“When a man taketh a wife, and marrieth her, then it cometh to pass, if she find no **favour** in his eyes, because he hath found some unseemly thing in her, that he writeth her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house ...”* (Deuteronomy 24:1)

*“She [Lady Wisdom] will give to thy head a chaplet of **grace**; a crown of glory will she bestow on thee.”* (Proverbs 4:9)

- chaplet: a wreath made of leaves, flowers or twigs woven into a ring.

*“He that rebuketh a man shall in the end find more **favour** than he that flattereth with the tongue.”* (Proverbs 28:23)

*“**Grace** is deceitful, and beauty is vain ...”* (Proverbs 31:30)

An Understanding

A study by Carsten Ziegert, professor of Hebrew Scriptures, of the uses of **יָנָה** (*chane*) in the TaNaKh concluded that ... perhaps ... the word should be thought of as meaning ...

acceptance

Grace ?

“The Christian faith is all about grace.”

“According to the Christian faith, we live by grace and are saved by grace ...”

“Nothing in the message of Christianity makes sense apart from God’s grace.”

“With all our concentration on grace, we have considered carefully *what grace does*, how it operates upon us, the effects it has on believers and so forth. But we have not often directed our attention to the question of *what grace is*.”

“The sixteenth-century Reformers urged that salvation is entirely *sola-gratia* (‘by grace alone’) ...”

But ... “Protestant theologians have not directed their attention to the question we are considering.” ... what is grace?

James Payton Jr. ... Professor of Patristics

Is this emphasis on grace ... a concept we cannot adequately define ... misdirected?

In Christianity

Jesus preached the coming of the Kingdom of God and how one had to act to enter into/ participate in that reign of God.

Paul preached salvation by grace ... faith ... through “church.”

In the Scriptures ... Jesus never uses the word ... **grace** ... not once.

Jesus never calls for the establishment of “**church**” ... an institution with an ecclesial hierarchy ... rite, ritual, sacraments, and required “beliefs.”

Jesus’ concept of “**faith**” involves “trust” ... rather than belief in creedal statements. Trust in what? ... Trust in God ... the one he “sent” ... and what he had to say.

“Grace as a gift is not a central term in the Gospels to describe the relationship between persons or between God and humans.”

The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible

Grace

The term “grace” is used 118 times in the Christian scriptures (NRSV).

Χάρις (Greek ... *charis*) ... that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness ...

... graciousness

Gospels		Acts	Pauline Epistles (13)	Others (9)
Synoptics	John			
0	4*	11	81	22

* The term is only used within the Prologue of the Gospel.

Jesus never uses the term ...

Grace is not a term used by Jesus ... but a term used by the church.

Grace and Faith

“Grace is the basis for the Christian faith.” Compassion International

“For by grace you have been saved through faith ...” (Ephesians 2:8a)

“We come to God through faith alone.” Martin Luther

“For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20b)

“Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

(John 14:12-14)

- Is this ... has this ... ever been true?

Where is this happening today?

If this is true ... what does this say about people’s “faith” today?

Faith

The word **faith** is oftentimes misunderstood ... or misused.

- The primary definition of faith is ... “complete **trust** or confidence in someone or something” ... but the secondary definition is the one most often used/ understood ... “strong belief in God or in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof.”
- So ... **trust** ... or ... **belief**. “**Or**” ... because the two meanings are quite different. Which predominates ... which should have the higher priority?

Judaism ... When the Hebrew scripture and rabbinic literature use the word *emunah* אֱמוּנָה (faith) for man’s relationship to God, it always denotes ... not belief ... but **trust in God**. It never signifies that God exists (a belief alone) ... that is always a given.

Christianity ... from the Greek ... πίστις ... *pistis*. From *peithô* “to be persuaded.”

- In secular antiquity (Greek) ... a guarantee (warranty).
- Early English (13th cent) ... “duty of fulfilling one’s **trust**.”

A view

If I have found favor with you ... show me your ways ... so that I may mimic your concerns ... actions ... nature.

- “Grace as a divine gift that transforms relationships ...”
- “The grace of God in Christ has ethical implications for human relationships.”
- “The quality of grace in the new age surrounds humans and is also evident in them.”

The Westminster Theological Wordbook of the Bible

“What it means to be under grace is that your sins are not imputed against you ...”
GreatBible Study

- “Cheap grace” weakens God’s demand for perfection.
 - *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (Matthew 5:48)
- Paul greatly expands the use of the term ... to include a “quality” that Christians possess.