
What Is Sin?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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There are two kinds of sin in my world. The first type is similar to our well-worn and common definition; it is wrongdoing. I do things wrong. Surely I do not do *everything* wrong, but I sometimes do. On some days, I *often* do things wrong! In my thoughts and attitudes, I treat people with less than respect. I find myself thinking ill thoughts, and even mentioning less than honorable things.

On some days, it is not just my thoughts that are wrong. My actions, too, do not welcome others; my actions do not grace other people. I waste the resources of those people around me. I waste the earth's resources.

All these are ways of sin. They are ways that I "miss the mark." I know, in my spirit, that my life is more lively when I am in right relationship with God and with other people and with the earth; but my actions and thoughts often betray me. I choose not to be in healthy relationship. All this is sin, by way of wrong relationship.

However, there is another sort of sin in my life. It is the sin I sense when I wake up in the morning and cast off the old night, the old day, in order to welcome the new. I compare this sin with the shell, or the dead exoskeleton, of some animal going through a metamorphosis. There are occasions in our human lives, too, when we must shed the old in order to prepare for the new.

In much of our ordinary lives, we human beings have lost our awareness of those daily rhythms of the earth. Our lives in conditioned automobiles and in conditioned offices and in conditioned homes and before intricate screens prohibit us from experiencing an old rhythm of nature and the world. That old rhythm is the way of death and resurrection; it is the way of Christ.

All around us, the world dies and is reborn. The moon wanes and waxes, though we rarely know what phases the moon is in. Leaves fall off trees for a season of dormancy. Tides come in and out. Bodies grow and then they die. From their remnants, and from their descendants, new life emerges.

When I ask God to forgive sin in the morning, I am saying that not only do I regret yesterday's actions, I am also saying that I admit the ebb and flow of God's creation. I admit that I must die to something. I admit that I must die to something today so that I can know resurrection tomorrow.

The Episcopal Church prays a general confession each Sunday. Most of us admit an individual confession daily, or several times a day. Those confessions are not only admissions of specific error. They are also ways that we confess our connection with the dying and rising of God's creation. Parts of us must die, over and over again, if we are to know the fresh grace of God, also over and over again.

The admission of sin, then, is also the preparation for grace. We do not know the awesome grace of God without first clearing the way, casting off the cloaks of darkness and old, and putting on the new garments of righteousness. In the final analysis, that garment of righteousness, is the garment of right relationship. It is a new skin of right relationship. If we live into God's dying and rising each day, we are truly in right relationship with the God of truth, and with God's earth, and

with God's people.

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