

I never thought reading a book on sin could be so enjoyable. Cornelius Plantinga, the president of Calvin Theological Seminary has written an excellent book on the doctrine of sin. "Not the Way its Supposed to Be" is the kind of book that you can give to anyone. Plantinga aims to write for non-theologians. He desires to recover the awareness of sin. His book is very well written, it is clear and easy to follow. His explanation of the concept of cosmic shalom illustrates well his lucidity. He says Shalom is a "universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight--a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be." (p. 10) This lucidity is typical of Plantinga's writing throughout the book.

Plantinga begins his book by defining sin. Sin is vandalism of shalom, it is disturbance of God's creation. He then goes on to discuss the distinction between sin and immorality. In chapter 2 Plantinga discusses the corrupting nature of sin. Sin puts asunder what God joins together. Sin despoils things and wrecks shalom. He then discusses what a spiritually sound person looks like, which is to long for God, Christlikeness, and spiritual maturity. In chapter 3 Plantinga discusses perversion, pollution, and disintegration. We pervert our own longings and we pervert judgments. Perversion is sometimes an ingredient in moral and spiritual pollution. Disintegration is the main event in pollution. In chapter 4 the progress of corruption is discussed. Reaping what you sow and other dynamics of sin illuminate and predict the progress of sin. In chapter 5 sin is presented as a parasite. It is an unwanted guest which insists on

sustenance. The parasitic nature of sin accounts for the fruitfulness of sin. A masquerade is discussed in chapter 6. Sin has to masquerade in a false appearance in order to do its worst. Folly and sin is the discussion of chapter 7. Sin is wrong and dumb. It is folly. It is foolish to offend God. Addiction is the subject of chapter 8. Here Plantinga discusses the nature and dynamics of addiction and its relation to sin. In chapter 9 attack is discussed. Sin has an offensive nature. It can physically attack as in murder, it can attack a persons reputation as in lying, and it can attack through envy. Finally, in chapter 10 flight is discussed. Sin leads us to want to evade responsibility for our wrong actions.

This doctrine is all too neglected in today's church and therefore is a subject that can be sensitive to talk about and it is usually evaded because of this. However, Plantinga gives a good reason for why the church needs to understand that doctrine of sin. He says,..."traditional Christianity is true, its truth saws against the grain of much in contemporary culture and therefore needs constant sharpening. Christianity's major doctrines need regular restatement so that people may believe them, or believe them anew." (p. x) I admire how Plantinga does not shy away from dealing with the difficult aspects of discussing sin such as when he discusses in the experiment of Stanford Milgram which demonstrated the common person is capable of inflicting harsh punishment on innocent people. (i.e. the people in the experiment were capable of shocking an innocent victim repeatedly with increasing voltage up to 450 volts) Yet, though Plantinga does not shy away from telling of the deep depravity of the person Plantinga also deals well with these issues sensitively as is clearly seen throughout the

book. He recognizes the sensitivity of the issue when he says, "...anyone who tries to recover the knowledge of sin these days must overcome long odds. To put it mildly, modern consciousness does not encourage self-reproach." (p. x)

I love how Plantinga puts sin in its proper perspective. Sin is an intruder into God's creation. Sin is defined in relation to God. Sin is covenantal unfaithfulness to God. Sin is culpable shalom-breaking. By casting sin in these terms Plantinga puts sin in the Biblical view. Sin is not just viewed from our individual relationship to God. It is also viewed as an intrusion into the entire cosmos. Sin then affects more than just our relationship with God, it affects the whole created order. This is a concept which is not often discussed when people speak of sin today. Most people in the church today if they speak of sin speak of it solely in terms of "my" relationship to God. However, there is more to sinning than what it does to a person's individual relationship to God. Plantinga captures this well in his book.

I think that anyone who reads this book should find nothing to say against it and find little to critique. Plantinga deals with the issue as good as anyone can. It is a book that almost anyone can read, understand, and enjoy. Due to its clarity and thorough explication of the subject no one has to worry about not being able to understand what is written. I highly recommend this book to anyone!

