

The sinfulness of mankind

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SO... lets talk about coronavirus



The unhappy side of the “toilet paper panic.”

- On Sat 07/03/20, two women in a Western Sydney Woolworths got into a physical fight over toilet paper.
- One woman wanted a single pack of toilet paper, while the other one had a trolley full on it.
- Both women got charged and will face court in April.
- Full story here: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-08/coronavirus-toilet-paper-fight-at-woolworths-leads-to-charges/12037046>

Bringing out the “worst in people.”

- While in some instances, hardship brings out the best in people, mostly we hear about how it brings out the worst in people.
- I have personally learnt a lot from the coronavirus epidemic. Not from the disease itself, but from how people are reacting to the perceived threat.
- A month ago, the aforementioned toilet paper fight would have been unthinkable. In the “grand scheme of things,” the coronavirus is not a particularly deadly threat, but the mere threat of the disease spreading has caused otherwise regular people to behave in extreme ways. I shudder to think what would happen in an actually severe crisis, such as a war.

The Bible proved correct again

- There are two important aspects of Biblical worldview which I think have been proved absolutely correct by the coronavirus episode.
 - That hardship bringing out the best in people, is a sign of the Holy Spirit working in your life. (I talked about this in the Early Service, if you weren't there sorry).
 - That mankind has been tainted to such a state that we tend to fall into a sinful nature when left to our own devices. The only remedy to this is the Holy Spirit. This is what I'm going to focus on now.

From the start

- It is well established, that the first sin committed against G-d on this Earth was when Adam and Eve rebelled against G-d.
- It is also well established, that they both received punishments which directly affected them:
 - For Eve, pain in childbirth and that man would rule over her (Gen 3:16).
 - For Adam, he would have to work hard to provide for himself (Gen 3:17).
 - They both had to leave the garden.

From the start

- But what about afterwards?
- The answer to this depends on your perspective. Judaism and Christianity have two quite different understandings of the consequences of the first rebellion against G-d.
- Judaism understands the main consequences as being the physical punishments, but with no eternal consequences for the nature of mankind.
- Christianity understands that the consequences were both physical and spiritual (i.e. that the nature of mankind was somehow tainted by this episode).

Judaism's perspective

- Mankind was indeed punished for the sins of Adam and Eve.
- Some also say that the fact that people are not immortal is also a punishment for this sin.
- However, Jews tend to dispute the concept of the inheritance of a tendency to sin from our ancestors. According to modern Jewish theology, we have two natures, a good and an evil inclination (yetzer ha-tov and yetzer ha-ra). Adam and Eve fell into temptation by their evil inclination and were punished. However it is each person's struggle and the struggle is weighted equally, the same as it was back then.
- We all have the equal opportunity to do good, in just the same way as Adam and Eve did. Most importantly, our souls were born innocent and untainted by the "original sin." We are personally responsible for our own sin.

Judaism's perspective

- Some quotes by modern rabbis regarding the issue:
 - The term “original sin” is unknown to the Jewish Scriptures, and the Church’s teachings on this doctrine are antithetical to the core principles of the Torah and its prophets...the Christian doctrine of original sin is profoundly hostile to the central teachings of the Jewish Scriptures (Rabbi Tovia Singer-Outreach Judaism).
 - Jews do not believe in the doctrine of original sin. This is a Christian belief based on Paul's statement, "*Therefore just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned*" (Romans 5:12). The doctrine was fully developed by the church father, Augustine of Hippo (Gerald Sigal-Jews for Judaism).

Is the Jewish perspective correct?

- The modern Jewish perspective is indeed a very attractive one. On the surface it looks to be the more correct one too.
- How can a person be affected by the mistakes of their ancestors?
- Isn't it unfair to have the burden of the original sin upon us?
- I try my best to do good, does that mean I still have "original sin."

Some important clarifications

- This concept does nothing to diminish personal responsibility. We are still responsible for our actions, both good and bad.
- This does not mean that people are incapable of doing good. Even the most wicked person has the ability to do good.
- People are, of course, able to be positively and negatively influenced by their parents, teachers and circumstances.

Some important clarifications

- What it does mean is that if we were to put humanity in a vacuum, and remove all other influences, would gravitation to sin be more likely, less likely or even. Biblically speaking, there is only right and wrong, not much room for a “middle-ground.”
- Judaism says the odds are even, because both good and evil inclinations were made in balance and they stayed that way. Christianity says that perhaps for Adam and Eve they were balanced, but not since then. Since then, as the weight of sin in this world has increased, the balance has tipped towards the evil inclination.

What the New Testament says about this

- Paul summarises this best in the book of Romans, I will remind us of a few key passages:
 - “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom 3:23)
 - “knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. (Rom 6:6)
 - “...therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...” (Rom 5:12)

What about the Tanach?-Genesis 8

Genesis 8:20-21

“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, *for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth*. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.”

What about the Tanach?-Genesis 8

- G-d just destroyed most living creatures in the world because of the sin in it, and He promises not to do it again, because He knows the same sin, that warranted the near destruction of man, is still there.
- This punishment did not remove the sinfulness of man, or even atone for it.
- Only G-d's mercy allowed mankind to be spared a repeat of this in the future.

What about the Tanach?-Jeremiah 17

- Jeremiah 17, is a rather chilling passage, where Jeremiah pours his heart out to G-d, desperately pleading for mercy, knowing the sinfulness of Judah and that Judah has earned the coming punishment of the Temple's destruction.
- There is a sense of hope in this passage but Jeremiah is also resigned to the fact that mankind has wickedness that it cannot overcome.
- Nonetheless, Jeremiah holds Judah responsible for her actions and prophesied that they will be rewarded if they repent. (However, we know from the rest of the Tanach that they do not).

What about the Tanach?-Jeremiah 17

Jeremiah 17:5-10 (ESV)

“Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?* "I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

What about the Tanach?-Psalm 51

Psalm 51:1-5 (Here, King David is expressing his remorse for his sin concerning Bathsheba).

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*”

A few notes about generational transmission

- Generational transmission (of both sin and reward) is well established in the Tanach:
 - Leviticus 26:39 “And those of you who are left shall rot away in your enemies' lands because of their iniquity, and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall rot away like them.”
 - Exodus 34:6-7 “The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

An interesting note from the rabbis

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 131:1

“It is customary to perform the *kapparos* ritual *erev Yom Kippur*, early in the morning, for then God's compassion is at its height. Men take roosters and women take hens, *and a pregnant woman takes a rooster and a hen*. The rooster is taken in case she is carrying a male; and if the child is a girl, one hen suffices for the mother and the child.”

(If someone is not born with sin, why does a pregnant woman have to consider atonement for her unborn child?)

A note from history

- I believe this is the greatest argument for the concept of “original sin.”
- Of course, history is filled with great examples of righteousness.
- But it is telling that most of our commemorations (in secular history anyway) are for great tragedies-which are mostly man-inflicted.
- It is beyond the scope of this discussion to go into this in great detail, but even thinking about the 20th century, and all the wars, would be enough to show how wicked man can be when he is allowed to “be only human.”

Why does this matter?

- I realised I have portrayed a pretty depressing view of mankind.
- But just because it is uncomfortable, it doesn't make it untrue.
- What is the value of understanding the Biblical view of the state of mankind?
- Most will say, it is to understand that we cannot inherit salvation by ourselves and need to have trust in the Saviour-the Messiah.
- This is true, but I feel there is an even more practical message for us today, particular in light of the various "crises" we find ourselves in.

Trust G-d, not man

- I believe this is the practical message we can derive from our understanding of original sin.
- If our hope is in our neighbours (even believers), institutions or even governments, we are doomed to suffer through an unanchored, flimsy and rather terrifying experience. “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.” (Psalm 146:3)
- But if we put our hope and faith in G-d alone, we can overcome our challenges and be content, no matter the circumstances. “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Messiah’s power may rest on me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)