

# Slaves to Sin

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*Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2026 - 10:00am Holy Communion*

## **Matthew 10:40-42**

‘Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.’

### <Prayer>

A few weeks ago a letter was received suggesting that the England flag of St George which flies above this church should be removed, because (as they claimed) it inherits and applies to us the recent misuse of the flag in the hands of those who have marched with it, for very different intentions than those of a saint. Of course not. That flag flies over a house where goodness and love have been held and practiced since the day this church was built. That is what *that* flag it inherits. It has been made sacred and sanctified by its context.

As it is with people. **How a person lives, in the presence of God, or not, will define them. St Paul has something of that to share with us today.**

For those of you who like crime drama, or crime fiction reading, you are not short of material. Prime time television is a constant rehashing of well-worn who-done-it themes, **with the riddle**

**usually leading to the unexpected person.** Crime fiction likes to make the final big reveal of the criminal and their motive. Perhaps it turned out to be the Rector who bludgeoned the Choirmaster to death with a candlestick!

Sadly, sometimes we need no fiction, when the barely conceivable yet true story of baby Preston reminds us of one of the worst crimes we have known in our society. This week, the sentencing of a secondary school teacher and their partner for the abuse and murder of a baby they had legally adopted, is truly shocking.

We may ask ourselves – *‘how could someone do such a wicked thing?’* **We all share the same species of humanity, so we have considerable investment in such a question.** What lies within the potential of the human psyche to appear normal and indeed respected, as all schoolteachers should be, yet within is the latent possibility of such an unspeakable crime?

**The doctrine of the Christian faith has to account for the sinfulness of humanity.** We believe we are given life by a perfect and sinless God. The Almighty created the Heavens and the Earth, but by only chapter three of Genesis, we are told of its catastrophic and permanent fall from Eden. I’m sure the story of Adam and Eve is familiar to you. The beliefs of the Christian faith contain the doctrine of *Original Sin* as an eternal truth which defines us all. By that doctrine, our lives are said to have inherited the possibility of wrongdoing and wrong thinking that could fall within a range of anything from mischief to pure evil.

Even before sin emerges, the creation story tells us that we are all born in God’s image. Theologians have understood this in various ways as *being capable of knowing God and possessing the dignity and potential to relate to Him.* We can display his glorious and

benevolent image in our personal and shared behaviours. Others have referred to God's image as our basis of thought, our conscience, being rational, knowing ourselves, yet being self-aware in how we may - on the one hand know ourselves as close to God in holiness, yet on the other hand – feel guilty when we know we are far from him by our behaviours.

**What we do know for sure is that being made in God's image is no guarantee of human perfection.** Sin has always been in the human heart, which arises from our knowledge of God our creator (which he allows us) and our personal freedom (which he gave us also). <pause>

St Paul writes this in his passage from the Letter to the Romans, as we have it in our first reading.

'Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.

At this point I could give you all the historical background as to why Paul was writing these things to those people at that time. But the context for sin and righteousness is the same for all of us. **Original Sin is the timeless outcome of freedom, reason and conscience, but always in respect to God.** I say: *in respect to God*, because the baseline of what is right and wrong must come from somewhere. The Church in its wide ministries, tries to keep the proximity of God and His Son Jesus Christ in the picture of life for people young and old. <First Communion classes>

**The first sin of all is when we try to *redefine* the terms of sin, usually directing it away from ourselves.** Those who commit evil may well think their behaviour is normal, in respect of what they have chosen to surround themselves with, and what to leave out. What dreadful context of behaviour had formed in the home of baby Preston that such crimes could happen, almost as normal to them?

**Hear again the words of St Paul: ‘Do not let sin exercise dominion over you; to make you obey *their* passions. Instead present yourselves to God.’ Only then can we know where we stand in sin and righteousness. <pause>**

History is full of examples where people have come to see how far they had fallen away from God, and to realign themselves to God as the foundation of their lives. Perhaps one of the most famous examples is John Newton, a slave trader and ship owner. You will know him by his most famous words: *"Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see."*

The slavery theme is how St Paul describes it several times – what will you be a slave to her asks, what will you choose to be under?

**‘Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?’** Obedience alone is not enough, because it can be misplaced. **Obedience has to choose the right master.**

**<Baptism Visit – we want the best for our children, a good start, some morals, etc. Why leave it to chance?>**

I suggest that there are three ways to consider how Original Sin works and persists amongst us:

Firstly, it's like a **hereditary disease**, a syndrome like a DNA fault built into us, but from which **healing is possible in Christ as salvation**. Is it any wonder that much of Jesus's ministry is amongst those who are disabled or ill – the lepers and the blind.

Secondly, sin as the result of a **malevolent power**, characterised in the real and active presence of wicked forces, like anti-Gods and fallen angels, which enter in and seek to draw us away from God and away from each other – to lock us into our worst state. This is what we think of a Satan. In this idea, **Christ comes to defeat the forces of sin and liberate us from bondage, also as a salvation**.

Finally, sin can be understood as a **persistent guilt** which remains in individuals and even whole societies, leaving them captive to their past actions, too ashamed to confess. You must forever carry what you have done, and if it's not dealt with then you pass it on.

**Salvation in Christ here is to bring forgiveness.**

St Paul sees a glorious release from all of this, when Christ becomes the exclusive head and heart of us: **'Thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.'**

This language of life in terms of slavery may put us off a bit, but you need obedience in your life somewhere. The alternative is to make yourself God – and that is the first and most pernicious sin of all.

**'So, what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification (that is - changing even more into the image**

of God). For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.' <pause>

I'll finish by having a pop at the secularists – as you know I like to do!

The neo-rationalist thinking of the Enlightenment, beginning from the seventeenth century, sought to erase the superstitions of God and sin, instead referring to our shared condition as our *state of nature*. That is the secular equivalent for sin: its natural – you can't help it. The early and very influential writer was the 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who wrote of our lives as:

*"The condition of man ... is a condition of war of everyone against everyone."* He describes our nature as: *"The life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."*

Hobbes goes on to advocate the ruling of a *strong man*, which is identified in the idea of a powerful mythical creature described in the Bible as The Leviathan. There shall be a strong person to rule us, with no oversight of God, yet answerable to the people in a kind of social contract where we can replace our leader if they don't come up to scratch (does sounds familiar?) I do think we expect far too much from our Prime Ministers.

In the end, people, no matter how strong, will always fail and disappoint. The baseline of your life should not be leadership.

**Only the presence of a perfect God can teach and guide us as to our best righteous state, and God provides the glorious means of Christ just for that.** He was a person too. So let us inherit our nature from him alone, not from anywhere else.

Amen