

JUSTIFICATION  
AND  
*Regeneration*

Second Edition



JUSTIFICATION  
AND  
*Regeneration*

Charles Leiter



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## JUSTIFICATION AND REGENERATION

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# Contents

Acknowledgments .....	7
Foreword .....	9
Preface .....	13
Chapter 1 Sin: Man's Ultimate Problem .....	17
Chapter 2 Can A Man Be Right Before God .....	25
Chapter 3 Justification: Its Characteristics .....	33
Chapter 4 Regeneration: All Things New .....	47
Chapter 5 A New Creation .....	51
Chapter 6 A New Man .....	57
Chapter 7 A New Heart .....	63
Chapter 8 A New Birth .....	71
Chapter 9 A New Nature .....	77
Chapter 10 Crucifixion & Resurrection .....	83
Chapter 11 A Change of Realms: Flesh to Spirit .....	91
Chapter 12 A Change of Realms: Earth to Heaven .....	101
Chapter 13 A Change of Realms: Sin to Righteousness .....	109
Chapter 14 A Change of Realms: Law to Grace .....	115
Chapter 15 A Change of Realms: Adam to Christ .....	123
Appendices:	
A. Regeneration: A Summary .....	133
B. "Cannot Sin" .....	143
C. Romans 7 .....	147
D. All Blessings in Christ .....	157
E. Frequently Asked Questions .....	167



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## FOREWORD

There seems to be a great abyss separating the biblical theologian and the Christian in the pew. While the theologian is able to climb the Everest of God's truth and be transformed by the vision, he often communicates the vision in a language that is beyond us. Thus, we are left at the mercy of popular Christian literature that is often nothing more than quaint stories, pragmatism, and baptized psychology.

The Church in contemporary America does not need more strategies, steps, or keys to the Christian life. The Church needs truth, and more specifically, the great foundational truths of historical Christianity. In this work, Pastor Charles Leiter has done a great service to the Church in that he has taken two of the greatest doctrines of Scripture and two of the greatest miracles in the Christian life and explained them in simple language without loss of content.

As I read through the manuscript of this book I was amazed at its simplicity and scope. The great doctrines of justification and regeneration can only properly be considered in the context of the other great doctrines of the faith—the holy and righteous character of God, human depravity, propitiation, repentance, faith, and sanctification, to name only a few. Pastor Leiter has not only given us a balanced view of each of these doctrines, but has also demonstrated how they intertwine to form the foundation of the Christian life.

Of particular interest to me was the setting forth of a proper view of regeneration. In modern day evangelism, this precious doctrine has been reduced to nothing more than a human decision to raise one's hand, walk an aisle, or pray a "sinner's prayer." As a result, the majority of Americans believe that they have been "born again" (i.e., regenerated) even though their thoughts, words, and deeds are a continual contradiction to the nature and will of God. Pastor Leiter demonstrates that regeneration is the supernatural work of God whereby the sinner's dead, depraved heart of stone is replaced with a new heart that is both willing and able to respond to God in love and obedience. Secondly, Pastor Leiter deals with Romans 6 & 7 in a logical and consistent manner, which he then

communicates to the reader with profound simplicity. Our brother's views concerning these two great chapters have been a source of great strength, comfort, and joy for me down through the years of my own pilgrimage.

I have read this book many times before its going to press. I have greatly benefited from its teaching and heartily recommend its contents. May the Spirit of God illuminate your heart and mind that you may not only understand the Scriptures explained herein, but that they might become a reality in your life.

Paul David Washer





## PREFACE

*“For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”* Titus 3:3-7

Two great miracles stand at the very heart and center of the gospel. The first is *justification*, whereby condemned criminals are made right in the eyes of a holy and righteous Judge. The second is *regeneration*, whereby malicious, enslaved, and hateful sinners are transformed into lovers of God and man. Either directly or indirectly, these two miracles appear everywhere in the New Testament. They are absolutely foundational to a proper understanding of both the *gospel* and the *Christian life*. Yet, even among genuine believers, there is much confusion and ignorance regarding these precious and soul-liberating truths.

The pages that follow are an attempt to set forth in clear Biblical light the nature and characteristics of justification and regeneration. To do this, we must first consider in Chapter 1 why it is that all men stand in such desperate need of these two divine acts. This will involve a discussion of both the objective guilt and the internal corruption caused by sin.

Because all men are guilty and corrupted by sin, there is a great moral dilemma standing in the way of man’s salvation: How can a righteous God justify unrighteous sinners without becoming unjust Himself? Chapter 2 examines this dilemma and the method by which divine wisdom has solved it through the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Chapter 3, the nature and characteristics of justification are then explored in light of seven truths about justification that are set forth in Scripture.

The Bible has a great deal to say about regeneration. In an attempt to get a clear view of what regeneration is, we will examine nine Biblical descriptions of this great miracle in Chapters 4-13. Each description views the same glorious reality from a different angle, while illuminating different facets of it.

In Chapter 14, both justification and regeneration are considered in terms of the larger categories of “law and grace” set forth in the New Testament. And finally, in the concluding chapter, both are considered as part of the even greater, over-arching reality of our being “in Christ.” Christianity *is* Christ. *Every* spiritual blessing is found “in Him”—including all the blessings of justification and regeneration—and *no* spiritual blessing exists apart from Him.

Throughout this book, many important Scriptures have been assigned to footnotes, and these are placed at the bottom of each page for easy reference.

Charles Leiter







## Chapter One

# Sin

## Man's Ultimate Problem

For a proper understanding of both justification and regeneration, we must begin where the Bible does, and that is with *sin*. All sin flows from man's perverse desire to put himself in the place of God—to be the center and measure of all things and to “know” for himself what is good and what is evil.<sup>1</sup> According to Titus 3:3-7, men in their natural state are “foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved to various lusts.” Their lives are characterized by “malice, envy, and hate.” Far from recognizing this state of affairs, lost men imagine themselves to be “basically good,” unless God in mercy reveals to them the true condition of their blackened hearts. *Sin is the ultimate and only problem of humanity*. It is *my* ultimate and only problem and *your* ultimate and only problem.

### A Biblical View of Sin

The Bible has a lot to say about sin. If we are to rightly understand sin's true nature, we must let the light of this Biblical revelation illumine our darkened minds and soften our calloused hearts. Just think of it! According to the Bible, sin is—

#### *Absolutely Universal*

Sin is absolutely universal in the human race. “*All* of us like sheep have gone astray; *each* of us has turned to *his own way*.”<sup>2</sup> “There is *none* righteous, not even *one*; there is *none* who understands, there is *none* who seeks for God. *All* have turned aside, *together* they have become useless; there is *none* who does good, there is not even *one*.”<sup>3</sup> You and I may not have met each other, but of one thing we can be certain even before our introduction—both of us are sinners. Every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth, no matter how old or how young, is a sinner. Even small children, when allowed to go their own way, are capable of the most exquisite cruelties to animals and to one another.

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:4-5   <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 53:6   <sup>3</sup> Romans 3:10-12

Race and nationality likewise offer no immunity from sin; the most cultured of nations are just as capable of genocide as the most barbaric. The gas chambers of the “civilized” are merely sophisticated forms of the machetes wielded by the “uncivilized.”

Neither is there any such thing as a “noble savage” or “happy heathen.” In the words of one former missionary, “I went to the mission field to keep a bad God from sending good men to hell. When I arrived, I discovered that they were monsters of iniquity.” The question is not whether men have had an opportunity to “accept Jesus.” The question is whether they have had an opportunity to mistreat the missionary and reject his message—for, apart from the special working of the Holy Spirit, that is what they will surely do.<sup>1</sup>

*Sin is universal in the human race.*

### *All-pervasive*

Not only is sin universal; it is all-pervasive. Every aspect of the human personality and of human existence is affected by it:

The *mind* is blinded. “The god of this world has *blinded the minds* of the unbelieving so that they might not see...”<sup>2</sup>

The *will* is corrupted and incapacitated. “The wickedness of man was great on the earth, and...*every intent* of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”<sup>3</sup> “You *will not* come to Me that you might have life.”<sup>4</sup> “No one *can* come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.”<sup>5</sup>

The *emotions* are disturbed and perverted. Some hearts smolder with constant anger and hatred; others are tormented day and night by senseless fears. Multitudes laugh at things that ought to make them weep, while others burst into tears for no apparent reason. Such are the deep and all-pervasive disturbances to the human personality caused, either directly or indirectly, by sin.

### *Irrational*

Sin is irrational. Many a priceless birthright has been bartered for one bowl of soup;<sup>6</sup> many a marriage and family thrown away for one night of illicit pleasure. For the temporary thrills of illegal drug use, the highest powers of the human brain are routinely

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:1-6   <sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4   <sup>3</sup> Genesis 6:5   <sup>4</sup> John 5:40   <sup>5</sup> John 6:44

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 12:16

and permanently destroyed. A moment's reflection on the sins of our own past is enough to confirm that *none of them makes any sense*. Such was the insanity of the prodigal son's actions that his repentance involved nothing less than "coming to his senses."<sup>1</sup>

*There is no wise sin.*

### *Deceitful*

Sin is deceitful. The Bible speaks of being "hardened by the *deceitfulness* of sin."<sup>2</sup> As with all deception, the victim is unaware of his deceived state. At the very time he thinks that he is "rich, and has become wealthy, and has need of nothing," he is in reality "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked!"<sup>3</sup> He "professes himself to be wise," but is actually a "fool."<sup>4</sup>

### *Hardening*

One of the most fearful things about sin is its power to harden the one who practices it.<sup>5</sup> The deeper a man goes in sin, the less sin bothers him. According to the Bible, man's very conscience becomes "seared as with a branding iron."<sup>6</sup> Every sinner finds himself now committing sins that he *once* despised, and the sins that he *now* despises, he will someday find himself committing. It should shock us to remember that Adolph Hitler was once a little boy playing with toys just like other little boys. Man knows the beginning of sin, but no man has ever known the end of sin.

### *Enslaving*

Sin enslaves those who practice it. "Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin."<sup>7</sup> None can free himself or escape from sin's bondage. Sin "reigns" over the sinner and rides on his back like a tyrant until it eventually brings him down to the pit of destruction and death.<sup>8</sup> If you are not a Christian, you have a chain around your neck far worse than any physical chain. You may be able to quit one sin, but another sin will immediately take its place—often the sin of pride or self-righteousness for what you imagine you have accomplished in reforming yourself. Sin is enslaving.

<sup>1</sup> Luke 15:17 <sup>2</sup> Hebrews 3:13 <sup>3</sup> Revelation 3:17 <sup>4</sup> Romans 1:22 <sup>5</sup> Hebrews 3:13  
<sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 4:2 <sup>7</sup> John 8:34 <sup>8</sup> Romans 5:21

### *Debasing*

Sin sinks the highest and noblest of men and women to the depths of shame and degradation. The young man who once wore a fine suit and sat in a leather office chair now lies unshaven in his own vomit as a result of sin. The young girl who was once clean and beautiful and innocent is now cheap and sensual and dirty—again, because of sin. Men and women made in the image of God, created to dream immortal dreams and to think the long thoughts of eternity, are reduced by sin to groveling in the muck like pigs for a piece of bread. Sin turned angels into demons<sup>1</sup>; it turns men into “unreasoning animals.”<sup>2</sup> Sin is debasing.

### *Defiling*

Finally, sin is defiling.<sup>3</sup> Sin is not a trifle; sin is not “cute”; sin is not funny. Sin is exceedingly *wicked and perverse*; it is “*utterly sinful*.”<sup>4</sup> *All sin is twisted and ugly and vile*. We should be shocked at how wicked men are and how callous we have become to that wickedness. We are *used* to it! The first baby ever born grew up to murder his own brother.<sup>5</sup> And human history ever since has been one long stream of constant warfare, lust, hate, torture, rape, perversion, abuse, and brutality. It is a blessed thing that we do not know in detail the sins that were committed just last night in our own town or city. Such knowledge would be too defiling to bear.

Yet, we must face the fact that the world is not the way it is because it has a few bad people like Hitler; the world is the way it is because it is made up of multitudes of people just like us! There is *deep wickedness* in each of us. Sometimes God will use something seemingly “little” to show us this wickedness. For Augustine, it was not so much his immoral lifestyle, but the wanton stealing of pears from a neighbor’s tree in his youth—not for hunger, but for sport—that revealed to him the utter depravity of his own heart. Sin, just for the delight of doing evil, without reason and without reward, flows from within the human heart and defiles us all.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 25:41    <sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 1:10    <sup>3</sup> Mark 7:20-23    <sup>4</sup> Romans 7:13

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 4:8

## The Two Sides of Man's Sin Problem

Sin is the ultimate and only problem of humanity. But this “sin problem” has two distinct aspects—one internal and the other external.

### *The Internal Problem—A Bad Heart*

According to the Lord Jesus Christ, man *himself* is corrupt and vile. “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”<sup>1</sup> This is the condition of every human heart, apart from Christ. If a motion picture of even our past thoughts, let alone our past actions, were to be played on a large screen before our family and acquaintances, every one of us would run from the room in shame. Every non-Christian is—in his person—more repulsive to a holy God than he can ever begin to imagine.

But man's problem with sin is even deeper than this. Suppose that by some miracle, the sinner could become a new person and never sin again for the rest of his life. *He would still most certainly go to hell.* The routine murderer who sincerely decides never to murder again must still pay for his past crimes. In other words, man's problem with sin has another dimension besides the internal. Man not only has a *bad heart*; he also has a *bad record* in the eyes of God's law.

### *The External Problem—A Bad Record*

Every sinner is a fugitive from justice. Regardless of the present condition of his heart, he has *objective guilt*, outside himself, in the eyes of God's law. He may not have any “guilt *feelings*,” but he *stands* “guilty” or “condemned,” nevertheless. All his *past crimes* cry out for their penalty to be paid and justice to be satisfied. This cry is anchored in the very character and being of God, in His attribute of *justice* or *equity*.

<sup>1</sup> Mark 7:20-23

It is because of the sense of equity or justice that God has written deep within the human heart that we feel immediate moral outrage when the perpetrator of a crime is allowed to go unpunished. *Why* is it wrong for the rapist-murderer to receive only a ten-dollar fine? We cannot *prove* that he deserves more, but we *know* that he does. This inescapable knowledge within us is something more foundational and certain than any theoretical “proof.” It is something absolutely basic to the human constitution—a reflection of God’s very nature.

Much could be said about God’s attribute of justice, especially in this day when the very concept of justice seems to be almost lost in society at large. There are three basic reasons why a crime should be punished: First, for the satisfaction of justice (i.e., because crimes *deserve* to be punished and *ought* to be punished); second, for the good of society (i.e., for the prevention of further crime); and third, for the good of the offender (i.e., to cause him to change his ways). Of these three, the satisfaction of justice is primary and foundational to the other two. If the punishment for a crime is not itself *just* and *deserved*, it will neither deter future crime nor reform the offender.

In our day, the primary and foundational reason for punishment—the satisfaction of justice—has been almost completely suppressed and denied. Only the second and third reasons remain, and these have been reversed in importance. The “reform” of the offender is now primary, and prisons are no longer called prisons, but “correctional facilities.” Even those who still believe that crime must be punished for the good of society maintain that murderers should be sentenced, not because they have murdered, but only in order to prevent future murders. Such a philosophy is wicked and false, and is based on the lie that men and women are not truly responsible for their actions.

It is not difficult to understand how this state of affairs has come about. Because men want to be God themselves,<sup>1</sup> they hate the thought of a sovereign Lawgiver to whom they must give an account. They seek to suppress the inescapable knowledge of God that is around and within them,<sup>2</sup> and say instead that there is no God.<sup>3</sup> This denial of God’s existence makes it easier for them to

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:4-5    <sup>2</sup> Romans 1:18f.    <sup>3</sup> Psalm 10:4; 14:1; 53:1

pretend that there is no such thing as right and wrong. Instead of being guilty sinners, men and women are viewed as helpless victims of their circumstances. In such a setting, punishment in order to satisfy justice becomes unthinkable. Man is free to do as he pleases and answers to no one.

But no matter how much men may try to suppress it, there is still an indelible knowledge in the human heart that *right* and *wrong* are real,<sup>1</sup> that men are *responsible* for their wrongdoing, and that sin *deserves* to be punished.<sup>2</sup> Deep down, all men know that the scales of justice *must* be balanced at last.<sup>3</sup> If you are not a Christian and are reading these lines, the scales of justice are very *unbalanced* in your life even now, and you can be *certain*—on the basis of God's very being and just character—that if you continue in your present condition, He will never rest or relent *until you are in hell*. The whole moral fabric of the universe would collapse if He *did not* put you in hell.

It is in this context that the Bible speaks of the “wrath of God.” God's wrath is not a temporary loss of self-control or a selfish fit of emotion. It is His holy, white-hot hatred of sin, the reaction and revulsion of His holy nature against all that is evil. God's wrath is tied in directly with His justice. It has to do with His righteous determination to punish every sin, to balance the scales of justice, and to make every wrong right. That is why the wrath of God “abides on” every unbeliever.<sup>4</sup> The more men persist in sin, the more they are “storing up wrath for themselves in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”<sup>5</sup> God's wrath *will* eventually be “poured out”; He is a righteous judge and *will not* allow sin to go unpunished forever.

<sup>1</sup> Romans 2:14-16   <sup>2</sup> Romans 1:32   <sup>3</sup> Acts 28:4   <sup>4</sup> John 3:36   <sup>5</sup> Romans 2:5