



SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES

What About Sin?

It is true that we cannot be free from sin, but at least let our sins not be always the same . . . - *St. Teresa of Avila*

If it were possible to have a life absolutely free from every feeling of sin, what a terrifying vacuum it would be! - *Cesare Pavese*

If a man possesses a repentant spirit his sins will disappear, but if he has an unrepentant spirit his sins will continue and condemn him for their sake forever. - *Buddha*

Opening and Chalice Lighting

We can shine like the brightest beacons, and so we should.

We can sparkle like the sun upon the waters.

But unless we know our darkest hearts and touch in others what repels us to the quick,

We will float on the surface of life and spin aimlessly in the wind;

We will remain estranged from the depths of our beings.

- *Bob Zeeb*

Quiet Reflection

From listening comes wisdom, and from speaking repentance. – *Italian Proverb*

Sharing/ Check-In

Take two or three minutes to share how you are spiritually, psychologically, emotionally, and physically. You can speak or you can pass. We want to know how you are in this moment.

Topic Reading

In the early nineteenth century, . . . sin became a dirty word in Unitarian and Universalist circles. Liberal theologians responded by claiming that we were born good. Any evils that manifested themselves during the course of our lives were the fault of environment, education, lack of opportunity, poor nurture, bad examples, or discrimination. These were the things that led us to fall, not sin.

Placed in the context of today's debate, Calvinists attributed our fate to genetics, liberals to the environment. The weakness of the Calvinist argument is not that it was based on original sin, but that it involved a capricious resolution of some people's sin by divine orchestration, while others were left hopeless, swinging in the wind. But in rebelling against this blasphemy against the creator and creation, we liberals went too far in the opposite direction. We concluded that sin was not a genetic predisposition, but rather an imposition by society upon children born not sinful, but pure and good.
- *Forrest Church*

Admitting that an act is not just wrong but sinful places it in a larger arena, for to sin is to tear the fabric of being, to be out of alignment not only with ourselves and those immediately before us but with the universe. I understand Unitarian Universalism's seventh principle, "respect for the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part," as requiring us to acknowledge that our lives have a sacred dimension. The sinner, as one rabbi told me, believes he's in business for himself. Atoning for one's sins—as Jews do on Yom Kippur—means, among other things, acknowledging one's interdependence with others and with all existence.

- *Philip Simmons, "The Usefulness of Sin," UU World (1999)*

**Break/Quiet
Contemplation**

As Unitarian Universalists, we are often either actively hostile towards the notion of sin or quite vague about it. We may, as Forrest Church argues above, have over-corrected. Or the word sin may, for some of us, stir up uncomfortable associations with religious upbringings we abandoned, religions we experienced that put too much emphasis on guilt and our own shortcomings or inadequacies.

**Sharing/Deep
Listening**

Speak about this topic in any way that is comfortable to you. If you choose to use the questions, focus on just one or two, as this will allow you to go deeper into the topic.

- What does the word "sin" imply to you?
- What is the history of your relationship with this concept?
- In what ways do you find the notion of sin a hindrance and a weight around your neck?
- In what ways do you find it useful and helpful as a way to connect with the dark side of yourself and with others?
- Where do you fall along this continuum of belief, or how do you struggle with this concept?

Discussion

This is a time to supportively respond to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.

**Checkout/
Likes & Wishes**

What did you like about this gathering? What would you like to see change at future gatherings?

Announcements**Closing Reading/
Extinguish Chalice**

Loose the cords of mistakes binding us, as we release
the strands we hold of others' guilt.
Forgive our hidden past, the secret shames, as we
consistently forgive what others hide.
Lighten our load of secret debts as we relieve others of their
need to repay.
Erase the inner marks our failures make, just as we scrub our
hearts of others' faults.
Untangle the knots within so that we can mend our hearts'
simple ties to others.
Loose the cords of mistakes binding us, as we release the
strands we hold of others' guilt.
- translations from Aramaic by Neil Douglas-Klotz