

Insensitivity to Sin

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When I was a young boy we chopped cotton in the Spring. The cotton seed, planted in late April or early May, would burst forth into tiny deep-green plants after having partaken of the sometime stingy West Texas rains. The rains also brought forth some nasty plants indigenous to the region—"goat heads," "Russian Thistles"—which everyone called "tumbleweeds"—"white weeds" and "Johnson grass". These plants would sap the precious moisture if they were not attended to as soon as possible. And so, armed with a hoe, an old water jug wrapped in a turban of "toe sack" material to keep it somewhat cool in the blistering sun, and with a good hoe, one with lots of steel in it, and with a trusty file to keep it sharpened just right, we would begin a new season of what was aptly described as "cotton-choppin' time."

The first few days were the worst. Not being used to being exposed to the sun, we would get what at least at the time seemed to be second-degree burns around the collar of the old khaki shirts we wore. When it got really hot and we began to sweat (we didn't know what "perspiration" was then), there was a strong tendency to scratch around the nape of your neck and down toward the button at the front of your collar. The more you scratched, the more it itched. The more it itched the harder it became not to scratch. The whole process just plain hurt. At least for the first few days.

But I think the worst part of all that Spring endeavor was the blisters. The first day or so you operate at the end of a hoe handle you get blisters—those small transparent bulges filled with a liquid which served to prove that cotton choppin' is an un-natural action and should actually be avoided. And blisters busted (or if you were in English class in High School, they would "burst). And when they do you get sore. Sore. But in the spirit of "don't give up the ship," you keep on choppin'. Then one morning it happens. You look at your hand and you still see some small protrusions just under each knuckle and just where the blisters were. But they're not blisters any more. Now they're calluses. And calluses don't hurt anymore, because calluses aren't sensitive to hoe handles. You can stick a needle in a callus and you don't even feel it. They're insensitive.

This generation has lost its sensitivity to sin. Sin is being tolerated so much that it no longer bothers people. We don't blush any more (Jeremiah 6:16). Even the worst sins produce no sensation of conscience, cause no moral discomfort. Oh, it once did; but after a while it no longer stung so much; you get so you don't notice it much. Our blisters have turned to callousness and that truth which was intended to prick and disturb our consciences has now become little more than an occasional nudge. We need to "give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Hebrews 2:1). Does the needle still sting or not?

Granted, most times it's easier to tolerate than to resist. Oh, it may sting a little at the

first, but after a while we tend to get used to it. We soon find ourselves not just tolerating sin, but actually defending it. “Resist the Devil and he will flee from you,” (James 4:7) says by implication that if we don’t resist him he will keep hanging around. The Devil is a formidable foe, albeit one who is cunningly subtle. He doesn’t produce the seductive measures of sin in big packages, but in small, cleverly decorated gifts that are at once attractive and filled with interestingness. They’re hard to resist. Ask Eve. Ask David. Ask Peter. Ask anybody; we’ve all had our moments.

It’s easy to minimize the seriousness of sin. We tend to tolerate rather than resist. We even categorize sins as “big sins” and “little sins” and though we don’t actually refer to them that way, that’s how they are treated. And isn’t it so that my sin is not often as bad as someone else’s? And aren’t my reasons for doing it more logical, even more “forgivable” than his? Self-justification is one of the most subtle tools of Old Scratch. Sin is sin. And “the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20).

The whole process is predictable. If we’re not careful, we will tolerate sin in our midst so long that we become devoid of any disquieting conscience pangs and eventually become so tolerant of sin that we don’t very much oppose it. We become “broad-minded,” and “mature.” We are now “morally grown up” and we “tell it like it is.” Finally we come to the point that we are free to choose what we will do, with whom we will do it, where we will go, how long we will stay and all of it no matter who does or does not care. We have finally made it.

Free? Morally mature? Nope. Just no more blisters. It’s calluses now.