

An Ethiopian's Skin and Your Sin

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After taking (too) many pictures on a ministry trip to Ethiopia, I was interested to hear how people would react to my photos. Here's one of the common responses: "I can't believe how green it is there. I always thought it was dry and dusty."



I've been informed that not all of Ethiopia is as lush as the places I visited, but most of the land I saw was fertile and inviting. Before the trip, I pictured all of Ethiopia as a desert, but I observed hills and mountains full of vegetation. I imagined ground that was cracked from sweltering heat, but what my eyes actually witnessed was land ready for the construction of world class golf courses. I had the scenery of Ethiopia all wrong in my mind.

I wonder if you have the same problem when thinking about yourself, except in reverse. Perhaps you think that from the moment you came into this world, you were beautiful in God's eyes. You have compared yourself with other people, perhaps the rapists or murderers you hear about in the news, and said to yourself, "Compared to those animals, I'm really a decent person. Surely God accepts me just as I am."

If that's what you think, you are mistaken. Take a brief trip into the Bible and see for yourself:

"The Lord said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth.'" (Genesis 8:21)

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:3)

"All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." (Isaiah 53:6)

"All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." (Isaiah 64:6)

"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

"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." (Mark 7:21-23)

"Both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, '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.'" (Romans 3:9-12)

"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 mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (Romans 8:7-8)

"Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (James 4:4)

"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8)

Do you still believe that God accepts you just as you are? The verses above are just a small portion of what Scripture says about the nature of man, but the whole Bible is unequivocal: From birth we are sinners by nature, enemies of God, and worthy subjects of His wrath (see John 3:36).

Even worse, there is nothing we can do to save ourselves from this dreadful dilemma. Jeremiah 13:23 says, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil" (NIV). It is as likely for a person who is a sinner to do good as it is for an Ethiopian to change the color of his skin. In other words—it's impossible. Left to ourselves, we are helpless and doomed.

But there is hope for the person who acknowledges the devastating truth about the depravity of man: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The wrath of God that was owed to guilty sinners was poured out upon the righteous Son of God who died on a cross as a substitute for His people and then was raised from the dead.

You may still not believe me about the beauty of Ethiopia, but it will be to your eternal benefit to believe what God says about your sin and the righteousness of Christ that can be yours through faith in Him.