

# REDEEMER

R E P O R T

JANUARY 2003

## SIN! (DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION?)

BY TIM KELLER

*Even the best human beings are so radically corrupt that they can be referred to as 'evil' persons.*

In Luke 11 Jesus is instructing his followers on the subject of prayer, and in the midst of it he says, "if you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more...your Father in heaven....?" This reference to his own disciples as *evil* is what we would call 'off-handed.' It is a casual comment that reveals an astounding (to modern readers) assumption of Jesus, namely, that even the best human beings are so radically corrupt that they can be referred to as 'evil' persons. Nevertheless, though he calls them 'evil,' it is obvious that Jesus loves his disciples with the utmost

tenderness and even delight, and is willing to pay the ultimate price for them (cf. John 13:1; 17:20-26.) Obviously, this is a totally different view of 'sin' and 'evil' than exists in the world today. No one, apart from those who hold Jesus' view of sin, can look at their friends and family, take genuine delight in them, and yet say, "I love them—but they have lots of evil in them! And so do I!"

What then is the Biblical view of sin? Sin is a distortion and dislocation of the heart from its true center in God (Rom 1: 21-25.) This is expressed in a basic

motive for all human life—the heart desire of every person to be his or her own Savior and Lord (cf. the serpent's original temptation in Genesis 3:5- 'you will be *as God*.) Kierkegaard used very modern terms when he defined sin as building your identity on anything besides God. That is just another way to put across the old Biblical themes of idolatry, self-justification, and self-glorification.

Sin therefore is something that everyone is doing all the time. (See Romans 1:18-3:20 with the summary in 3:20.) People who flout God's moral law are doing

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## CHRISTMAS GIFTS FOR CHILDREN IN NEED

BY CHRISTINA STANTON, HFNY VOLUNTEER

*At the party over 300 children received gifts that nine congregations had taken part in collecting*

Kristen Mell, a first-time Angel Tree Volunteer, was on the train the night after the Angel Tree party and she wrote:

"I was sitting on the train on my way home tonight when a mother and her 4 children walked onto the train (in midtown). I recognized one of the gifts the little boy was holding and when I looked at the other children, they had faces painted and gifts that also looked familiar! It brought such joy to see them so happy holding their new toys so tightly. It just reminded me (and my tired body) what a wonderful day I just had."

Kristen was one of over 60 volunteers that helped with the Angel Tree party December 7th. Angel Tree is part of the Prison Fellowship Ministry that gives Christmas gifts to children of incarcerated parents. At the party over 300 children received gifts that nine congregations had taken part in collecting—Redeemer, The Village Church, Trinity in Westchester, Astoria Church, The Haven, and Calvary@Six. It was

an incredible day that no one who attended will forget, as God provided for the physical and spiritual needs of hurting families. As Diana Joseph, Coordinator of Angel Tree with the Manhattan Bible Church said, "It was a Great Day that will last for an ETERNITY!"

This was my first year Team Leading the Angel Tree event. I had not been involved in the program before as a volunteer, other

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this overtly, of course. But even moral religious people are trying to be their own saviors by earning salvation and being good. It is just as possible to avoid Jesus as Savior (and be your own savior) by *keeping* God's law as by *breaking* it. Everyone is separated from God equally—regardless of the external form of behavior.

It is the fundamental motives of self-justification and self-glorification that distort our lives and alienate us from God. And until a person is converted they operate as the main motive for *every* thing we do. This is true in every culture and class of people. In the ultimate sense, then, everyone is equally a 'sinner' in need of Jesus' salvation by grace alone.

Once this radical view of sin is grasped, it revolutionizes the believer's attitude toward others in the world who do not share his or her beliefs. Here are two ways it changes you in this regard.

First, *it means you sense (now more than ever) a common humanity with others.* The Biblical view significantly changes in Christians the natural and traditional human attitudes toward those who behave in ways that they do not approve. It is normal for human beings (whose hearts are always seeking to justify themselves and are always trying to make the case that they are one of the 'good guys') to divide the world into the 'good' and the 'bad.' But if everyone is naturally alienated from God and 'evil' then that goes for everyone from pros-

titutes to ministers. So the Biblical teaching on sin shows us the complete pervasiveness of sin, and the ultimate impossibility of dividing the world neatly into 'sinful people' and 'good people.' It eliminates the attitudes of superiority toward others, and the practices of shunning or exclusion of those with whom we differ.

*Second, it means you expect to be constantly misunderstood — especially about sin!* The gospel message is: we are saved by Christ's work not by our work. But everyone else (even most people in church) believe that Christianity is just another form of religion, which operates on the principle that 'you are saved if you live a good life and avoid sin.' Therefore, when others hear a Christian call something 'sin'—they believe you are saying, "these are bad people (and I am good); these are people who should be shunned, excluded (and I should be welcomed); these are people who God condemns because of this behavior (but I am accepted by God because I don't do that.)"

You may not mean that by the term 'sin' at all, but you must realize and expect that others will hear what you are saying that way. They have to. Until they grasp the profound difference between religion and Christianity they will have to understand your invoking of the word 'sin' as self-righteous condemnation—no matter what your disclaimers.

For example, if most people

hear you saying, 'people who have sex outside of marriage are sinning' they will immediately believe you look down on them, that you think they are lost because of that behavior, that you are one of the 'good people' who don't do things like that, and so on. If people hear a Christian say— "well, these people are sinning, but I don't think of myself as any better than they are—we are all sinners needing grace"—they will think you just spoke nonsense. They have a completely different 'grid' or 'paradigm' in their minds about how anyone can approach and relate to God, and they are hearing the word 'sin' through that grid.

This is why wise Christians will in general try to avoid public pronouncements on particular behaviors as 'sinful.' Rather, they will try to get people to hear the radical message of the Bible about the true inward nature of sin, its universality, and salvation by grace. They will try to explain that people are ultimately 'lost' only if they are too proud to see they are lost and need a Savior who saves by sheer grace, just as a drowning person offered a life-preserver will only die if he won't admit he needs it.

Christians must talk to their friends about 'sin' in order to explain our need for Jesus and for God's grace, but we must do so in a way that quickly puts the term into the context of the whole message of Jesus' salvation.

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## REDEEMER REPORT

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than to sponsor a child a few years earlier. But I had heard that there was a need, and as I had some time, I thought Team Leading might be fun. Fun is the understatement! It was a blast! And not just for me, but the hundred-plus volunteers who came and worked at the five Volunteer nights, and for the 500-plus people who bought the actual gifts. I am convinced it is the ultimate volunteer experience, as even ONE hour dedicated from someone makes a huge difference!

As Carl De Prado, a volunteer, states, "You immediately become involved with the people you help, you see the difference, and

know that you're facilitating something that is so awesome. It is so faith-building, too, as we all stepped out on faith that God would provide presents for these kids and volunteers to help with the program, and it's amazing to see Him at work. He definitely did provide, and in such a huge and tangible way!"

Of course, Angel Tree is for the kids, as it is a way of connecting the children with their incarcerated parents. They know the gifts are from "Daddy" or "Mommy" (as the gifts that are sponsored are given with their parent's name as the donor), and so they know they are loved, even though they

are presently separated. But not only are they given the "Gifts of Love" at the party, but we attend to them spiritually as well. The children and their caregivers heard a sermon from a pastor, there were praise songs and testimonies, and Bibles in Spanish and English were distributed.

Being involved with Angel Tree this year was something I'll never forget. The smiles on the kids faces, the new friendships I made with the volunteers, and seeing God at work was truly incredible. I'll be involved next year, and I hope to see you all then!

## MISSIONS FAIR

**Sunday, January 26, 2003 after all 4 services**

Discover how you can be involved with missions:

view the St. Petersburg's short-term team video, see reports from last year's Peru, Kenya, London & Romania mission trips, learn about short-term opportunities in 2003!

## WEBSITE NEWS

**Online Store Adds Music & Curriculum Sections**

check out [www.redeemer.com](http://www.redeemer.com) to see what's new!

**Update Your Personal Mailing Information Online**

On February 1, Redeemer will begin its first update of the mailing data base in 8 years. Please update your info before April 30.

## CREATING AN ALTERNATIVE CULTURE THROUGH GOSPEL COMMUNITY: A SPECIAL REDEEMER CHURCH SERVICE JANUARY 29TH

Our desire is not just to create a great church but to build a great city.

The past year has presented our community with a new set of challenges. On Wednesday January 29, 7:00PM at St. Bartholomew's Church (50th St. & Park Ave.) Redeemer will hold a special service to examine our vision as it relates to Gospel community. This will be a service of praise, thanksgiving and teaching by Pastor Tim Keller and a unique opportunity to learn about Redeemer's vision for Gospel Community in our city. After the service Redeemer's Ministry Leaders will answer questions submitted from those in attendance.

**Fellowship groups, members, regular attenders and visitors are encouraged to attend.**



## HFNY & THE CHANGING FACE OF CHRISTIANITY

BY NANCY PRENTIS-BARTER, HFNY VOLUNTEER

I recently moved from Manhattan's Upper East Side to the heart of Brooklyn, into a neighborhood consisting largely of Middle-Easterners and Eastern Europeans, and have consequently been forced to look at this city through a new set of lenses. Though ashamed to admit it, the daily news of new terrorist attacks and the looming threat of war with Iraq have conjured up in me thoughts of a fear-driven and increasingly violent city in which cultures clash, rather than assimilate. So I was heartened to hear Dr. Keller recently speak to Hope for New York (HFNY) supporters about another possible scenario.

He urged his listeners to observe the current wave of immigration to America, primarily from the Southern and Eastern Hemispheres, not with fear and suspicion but rather with hope. Protestant Christianity in the non-Western world is growing at a tremendous rate. In many Asian and African countries the number of people turning to Christ is astounding. Korea's population, for example, is about

one-third Christian, and Nigeria has nearly eight times as many Episcopalians as America. Many of these people are emigrating, and bringing their beliefs with them. While "mainstream" Christianity seems to be stagnating and even on the decline in Anglo-American culture, grassroots Christianity is thriving in many of our immigrant communities.

Throughout the Boroughs of New York, small neighborhood churches and groups are sprouting up to minister within their community, and judging from the history of immigration to this country, one can conjecture that these communities are producing our city's future leaders. This provides those of us in mainstream culture, and in established churches, with the challenge of supporting, befriending and mentoring these brothers and sisters in Christ. The vision of HFNY is to serve the present and future needs of this city by supporting and sending volunteers into organizations like the Russian Community Life Center. Now is the time for the rest of us to do our part, to come alongside our

neighbors and fortify them, as they raise up the leaders of coming generations.

### A THANK YOU FROM THE DIACONATE

We would like to extend our deepest thanks for the generosity of God's people in their giving to our annual Mercy Fund Offering, received on December 8, 2002. These funds enable us to meet the financial needs of those in the Redeemer community who are suffering from a variety of difficult circumstances.

Please know that we are very grateful and consider you to be partners with us as we care for those God brings our way. If anyone was unable to give at the time of the offering, we accept donations throughout the year. Please earmark your check for the Diaconate or place cash in a special Diaconate envelope provided at the information table and drop in the offering basket or mail to the office. Thank you again.