

# Sin and salvation: a spiritual rebirth

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Sin and Salvation: A Spiritual Rebirth Sin is an inextricable force that entangles an individual who has committed a crime; only through confession can a man be free of his sin. In *Crime and Punishment* Dostoevsky manifests the evil and goodness of Raskolnikov, depicting the need for him to change—the need for the confession of his sin. Throughout the novel, Raskolnikov is lost and suffers from the consequences of his sin. Although he is in a struggle between good and evil, Raskolnikov cannot simply renounce his sins by his own determination; therefore, he must surrender his will and pride and be willing to confess his sin. By emphasizing the theme of confession and redemption, Dostoevsky effectively portrays the spiritual rebirth that Raskolnikov experiences when he confesses, especially through the story of Lazarus. Through the Biblical allusions in *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky illustrates the theme of redemption as Raskolnikov experiences sin and atonement. As Raskolnikov commits the crime of murder and lives in sin, Dostoevsky places a secular emphasis on Raskolnikov's life, divulging the human and sinful nature of those who lack God. Through demonstrating vice in Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky reveals the sinful nature of Raskolnikov. He is not only a sinner because of his crime of murder but also because of his self-confidence and self-centredness; Raskolnikov retains an inherent and strong belief in himself and places "his trust in himself, not in prayer" (Dostoevsky 88). Ironically, Raskolnikov places faith in himself although he is well aware of his own crime. His tendency to trust only himself in spite of his crime reveals his self-confident nature; he is not willing to listen to the opinions of others nor God. Therefore, Raskolnikov's sin is not merely the physical sin of committing murder but also the sin of placing faith in himself rather than

God. Jacques Madaule states that “ evil is in man as an unalterable quantity” (41). Raskolnikov’s evil exists as his arrogant attitude of trusting only himself causes him to lose direction, wandering aimlessly as he wishes to absolve himself of his sin. Without placing trust in God, Raskolnikov will never be able to expiate his evil and find his direction in life. In fact, Dostoevsky clearly underlies the idea that Raskolnikov is a lost man lacking direction: “ A young man came out of his little room...and turned slowly and irresolutely” (Dostoevsky 1). The word resolution appears on several occasions in the novel and displays Raskolnikov’s inability to come to a decision, especially the decision of whether to confess his crime or not. The critic Vadim V. Kozhinov notes that “ the word ‘ irresolution’ [nereshimost’] and the various word formations from the same root come up repeatedly in the novel, especially in the final scenes... ‘ insoluble’ [nerazreshimo]; “ inability to make up one’s mind” [neveshat’sja]” (17). As revealed throughout the novel, Dostoevsky has put tremendous thought into using the words of the same root as irresolution. Often describing Raskolnikov’s actions as irresolute, Dostoevsky stresses the idea that Raskolnikov is a man lacking true direction and purpose in life, exhibiting Raskolnikov’s extreme emotions of different sides, which range from wanting to confess his sins to wanting to conceal his crime. Unlike Raskolnikov, the Christian belief is to “ Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3: 5-6). In contrast to this belief, Raskolnikov depends only on himself and neglects God. His inability to confide in God causes him to lose direction and stumble on his path after committing the murder; he cannot firmly make a decision.

Furthermore, Dostoevsky continues to reveal the evil in Raskolnikov through divulging the hypocritical life that Raskolnikov leads when he is rebuked by his sister Dunya. As Raskolnikov questions Dunya's marriage to Peter Petrovich, she furiously reprimands him: " Why should you demand from me a heroism which, perhaps, you yourself are not capable of? That is tyranny, despotism" (Dostoevsky 223). In her speech, she underlies the idea of how women are expected to make self sacrifices whereas men are not. Her sharp words pierce through Raskolnikov's hypocrisy, especially when she exclaims that " If I destroy anybody it will be myself and nobody else...I have not killed anybody" (Dostoevsky 223). Through his sister's words, Raskolnikov realizes the depth of his sin and hypocrisy, feeling a heavy burden of guilt upon his shoulders. Evidently, the confidence that he places in himself causes him to suffer to a greater extent. Accordingly, Dostoevsky further emphasizes the devastating nature of pride through Raskolnikov's Napoleonic theory of the superhuman. Raskolnikov believes that " the extraordinary have the right to commit any crime and break every kind of law just because they are extraordinary" (Dostoevsky 248). In Raskolnikov's search to become superior, he plunges himself into sin through his act of murder. By going against the law to prove his superiority, Raskolnikov is no different from Adam and Eve when they eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3). In both cases, there is a desire to become more powerful and surpass the normal boundaries of man. Dostoevsky exemplifies the essence of the original sin within Raskolnikov's search to transcend human boundaries. Ironically, Raskolnikov's craving to become superior only drives him towards depravity and he suffers from the guilt of the crime,

becoming a weaker and more pitiful man in the process. Through his yearning to achieve superiority, Raskolnikov transforms into a stolid man lacking compassion as he claims that he “killed not a human being but a principle” (Dostoevsky 264). Raskolnikov’s lack of feelings for life emphasizes the deterioration of his values and the degradation of his morals. Although he wishes to surpass his fellow men, Raskolnikov is despicable, growing more disdainful as he attempts to reach the superhuman status. Essayist Nicholas Berdyaev articulates that “Christ came not to violate but to fulfill the law” and “the truly great, the men of genius who did great things for all of mankind, did not act in the manner of Raskolnikov. They did not consider themselves supermen to whom everything was permitted” (75). In order to be truly great, Raskolnikov must relinquish his superman idea and realize that he must follow the limits of what is permissible. As Christ came to fulfill the law, so must Raskolnikov also abide to the morals of humanity and accept the punishment of his crime; Raskolnikov cannot live a life that is superior to other men. In the midst of Raskolnikov’s grave sin, he feels inexorable guilt and is crushed by the consequences of his sin. He is not only disgusted with his crime as “repulsion... [grows] in his heart with every moment” (Dostoevsky 77) but also confused at the same time because he does not know how to expiate his crime. While Raskolnikov despises himself for the crime, he faces severe confusion as he wishes to relieve himself of guilt; yet, he refuses to confront the punishment for his crime because he believes he has a reason for his actions. As Raskolnikov is torn apart by this struggle, he is weary and feels “ever so slightly dizzy,” proclaiming that “he would not live like this” (Dostoevsky 148). Although he wishes to be rid of his

guilt, he cannot help but feel the burden of his crime. Nicholas Berdyaev argues: Because human nature is created in the image...of God...every man has an absolute value...when man in his self-will destroys another man, he destroys himself as well, ceases to be a man, loses his human image, and his personality begins to disintegrate. (74) For killing a fellow human being, Raskolnikov feels the burden of his sin and begins to break down, as denoted by his weariness. Evidently, Raskolnikov's energy is drained as he bears the consequences of his sin because he is not willing to repent. The Scriptures states that: " Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40: 30-31). In the first sentence of the novel, Raskolnikov is described as a " young man" (Dostoevsky 1) and now this young man is faltering and falling because he has chosen to sin and to rely on himself instead of accepting God's grace. Throughout the novel, Raskolnikov is constantly burdened with troubles and he is frequently weary because he is unwilling to give up his life to God. The consequences of Raskolnikov's sin are great and he is incapable of absolving himself of his grievous sin. Dostoevsky palpably heightens Raskolnikov's suffering as he becomes estranged from society and is unable to " understand with his mind as feel instinctively with the full force of his emotions that he could never again communicate with these people" (Dostoevsky 98). Upon committing his crime, Raskolnikov is broken off from society as he cuts the cord around Alena Ivanovna's neck. As the circle is a symbol for unity, the severing of the circle cord of the necklace depicts the dissolution of unity between Raskolnikov and society. Contrary to the idea of the unified body of Christ as

expressed in 1 Corinthians 12, Raskolnikov is isolated from society as he dwells in his sin. The idea of unity is central to Christianity and John Donne states that “ no man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main” (272). Once an individual has broken off from society, he will lose his function and purpose as a small piece of land loses its purpose once it is torn from the continent. Therefore, Raskolnikov’s estrangement from society is a type of death for him and he is unable to live fully unless he is reconciled with society and God. Despite Raskolnikov’s sinful nature, Dostoevsky reveals the struggle that Raskolnikov endures as he is in need of repentance. Goodness does exist in Raskolnikov and there are characters in the novel that influence him. Although he is a sinner, Raskolnikov acts as a Good Samaritan, giving all his money to the Marmeladov family when he witnesses Marmeladov’s death. Through the novel, Dostoevsky delivers guidance to Raskolnikov as Sonya is a spiritual guide who leads Raskolnikov into confession. She is a “ creature with a flame coloured feather” (Dostoevsky 185) and the fiery imagery surrounding her illustrates the image of an angel. Symbolically employing Sonya as an angel to guide Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky evinces the childlike qualities in Sonya that Raskolnikov must have in order to live a guiltless life and enter into God’s kingdom. She is “ simple-hearted and good” and seems “ almost a little girl still, much younger than her age” (Dostoevsky 228). These childlike qualities are essential for Raskolnikov to find salvation as Jesus teaches that “ except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18: 3). Thus, Dostoevsky demonstrates through Sonya the way to salvation. Essayist Yury F. Karyakin asserts: In

order that a man not merely acknowledge, but also repent of his crime and expiate it, he needs positive help. He must have something in himself which can give confidence both to him and to others who would recognize his humanity and wish to help him rise again. (95) Sonya is one of the forces that provide help for Raskolnikov, making him feel loved. At the same time, a divine force or spirit seems to influence Raskolnikov as he notices that “ the water, unusually for the Neva, looked almost blue” (Dostoevsky 108). In the Russian Orthodox Church, the colours black, blue, green, and gold all bear symbolic meaning. The colour blue is a symbol for the Spirit of God ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_Orthodox\\_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Orthodox_Church)). Through emphasizing the blue water of the Neva, Dostoevsky depicts that God’s spirit is appearing to Raskolnikov, trying to lead him back into God’s kingdom. The fact that the water is “ almost blue” and not completely blue represents that God’s spirit cannot be fully manifested in Raskolnikov yet because he is unwilling to repent. Through these influences, Raskolnikov is slowly led into confession as he feels the need to expiate his sin. As Raskolnikov experiences the struggle between good and evil inside of him, he is in need of change. He seems to have “ two separate personalities, each dominating him alternately” (Dostoevsky 206). Because of his internal struggle for which he cannot resolve through his own efforts, Raskolnikov possesses a side to him that wants to confess his sins and be rid of his guilt. At the same time, there is another side of him that wants to continue living without acknowledging his faults. As Raskolnikov endures this struggle, he faces harsh reprimand from Porfiry Petrovich. He takes on the role of a “ sort of prophet” that warns and admonishes Raskolnikov: “ Well, find your faith, and



you will live. To begin with, you have needed a changed of air for a long time. Perhaps, also, suffering is a good thing” (Dostoevsky 441). Porfiry stresses that Raskolnikov must change his way of living, or “ air”, in order to find his faith and live. Unless Raskolnikov finds his faith and is able to cast away the burdens of his sin unto God, Raskolnikov will incessantly live in torment. The idea of suffering is significant to the theme of salvation as the Bible teaches: “ consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (James 1: 2-3). In terms of Christianity, suffering draws an individual closer to God and Dostoevsky suggests that suffering is what Raskolnikov must experience in order to know God further. Through suffering, Raskolnikov realizes his powerlessness, seeing the need for him to confess his crime in order to relieve himself of his guilt. On his journey to confession, Raskolnikov bears a resemblance to Christ, accentuating the intensity of suffering. Before Raskolnikov confesses his crime to Ilya Petrovich, Raskolnikov asks himself a painful question: “ If I must drink this cup does it make any difference? The viler the better...If I must drink, let it be all at once” (Dostoevsky 506). Through the cup of punishment that Raskolnikov must drink, Dostoevsky alludes to Christ, who suffered a similar struggle in the garden of Gethsemane. Christ himself prayed “ Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22: 42). Christ was unmistakably in pain during his prayer as “ his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22: 44). As even Christ suffered tremendously when he was destined to fulfill his purpose, Dostoevsky—through the Biblical allusion to Christ—emphasizes the painful

and arduous process that Raskolnikov must experience in transgressing his sin. Although Raskolnikov, like Christ, is hesitant to confess his crime, he acknowledges that he must drink the cup that is prepared for him in order to atone for his sin. Jacques Madaule remarks that Raskolnikov lives in “ a world where each person suffers for everybody, and where everybody suffers for each, in Christ” (45). Madaule is certainly correct in the belief that suffering is pervasive in Raskolnikov’s life; however, suffering is predominant as a form of punishment for those who sin and not necessarily a lifestyle that everyone partakes in. The idea of everybody suffering in the name and unity of Christ is questionable but Raskolnikov certainly does suffer, perhaps not in Christ but like Christ. As Sonya hangs the cypress-wood cross on Raskolnikov’s breast, he exclaims “ This, then, is a symbol that I am taking up my cross...as if my earlier sufferings had been mere trifles” (Dostoevsky 502). The action of taking the cross is of momentous significance, symbolizing that Raskolnikov, like Christ, is bearing his cross and ready to bear the consequences. Of particular notice, taking the wooden cross instead of the copper cross represents that Raskolnikov chooses humility instead of extravagant pride. Through suffering, Raskolnikov learns to slowly let go of his pride. Taking the cross, Raskolnikov feels the true burden of receiving the punishment for his crime. Through depicting the powerful experience of atonement, Dostoevsky illustrates Raskolnikov’s redemption as he confesses his crime. The first signs of salvation for Raskolnikov are revealed as he experiences worldly redemption when he kneels “ in the middle of the square, bow[s] to the ground, and kiss[es] its filth with pleasure and joy” (Dostoevsky 505). In the act of kissing the earth, “ Raskolnikov is performing

a symbolic act...marking the beginning of his change into a complete, organic, living human being, rejoining all other men in the community” (Gibian 4). Through the “ gesture of kissing the earth, [Raskolnikov] is reestablishing all his ties” with society (Gibian 4). Although he is earlier estranged from society, Raskolnikov is now reunited with the community and is able to belong again because he finally confesses that he is a sinner. This reconciliation with man is significant because a man must be in fellowship with others, “ for as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ” (1 Cor 12: 12). Only through communion with his fellow men can Raskolnikov be a part of God’s kingdom and salvation. In his act of bowing to the ground, Raskolnikov becomes no longer an outcast but a repentant sinner who is able to be reconciled with society. In addition to worldly redemption, Raskolnikov ultimately experiences a spiritual redemption that allows him to be forgiven of his sin. The story of Lazarus that Sonya reads to Raskolnikov is a reflection of the spiritual rebirth that Raskolnikov experiences. George Gibian states that “ the raising of Lazarus from the dead is to Dostoevsky the best exemplum of a human being resurrected to a new life” (4). Evidently, the raising of Lazarus represents Raskolnikov’s death in sin and resurrection in confession. As Raskolnikov lives under the influence and suffering of his sin, he is no different from a dead man because his spirit is lacking vitality and the presence of God. The possibility of resurrection from Raskolnikov’s sinful life is exhibited as Sonya reads out from the Holy Scriptures: “ I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me shall never die”

(Dostoevsky 314). This passage accentuates that Raskolnikov can be forgiven of his sins and that his life can indeed be changed if he is willing to confess his sin and place trust in God. Upon confession, Raskolnikov is no longer burdened by the heavy suffering of his sin; instead, he enters into a new life free from excessive worrying. Both he and Sonya were “pale and thin, but in their white sick faces there glowed the dawn of a new future, a perfect resurrection into a new life” (Dostoevsky 526). The pale colour of Raskolnikov’s face represents death; yet, Raskolnikov is able to be resurrected into a new life through atonement and his abounding love for Sonya. Thus, the story of Lazarus powerfully captures the essence of Raskolnikov’s spiritual rebirth. Furthermore, Dostoevsky emphasizes the resurrection of Raskolnikov through the use of the sacred number seven: “Seven years, only seven years! At the dawn of their happiness, both had been ready...to think of those seven years as if they were no more than seven days” (Dostoevsky 527). On a literal level, Raskolnikov and Sonya love the life they share together to the extent that Raskolnikov’s days in prison will seem timeless and inexorably pass by at an alarming rate; however, the Biblical meaning behind the number seven distinguishes Raskolnikov’s spiritual rebirth. In church tradition, the number seven is sacred as demonstrated in the seven stars, seven seals, and seven churches of Revelations and the seven fold sprinkling of blood for the cleansing of sins in Leviticus. Through stressing the number seven, Dostoevsky articulates that Raskolnikov’s life will now be holy as the number seven is holy; therefore, Raskolnikov is finally able to lead a holy life because he has confessed his sin. Dostoevsky clearly accentuates Raskolnikov’s forgiveness, attributing

him with a sense of holiness. In addition, the number seven alludes to the seven days of creation. This further enhances the idea of rebirth in Raskolnikov where his old ways are gone and a new life is created. Dostoevsky himself maintains “ that is the beginning of a new story, the story of gradual renewal of a man, of his gradual regeneration, of his slow progress from one world to another” (Dostoevsky 527). In fact, Dostoevsky does not need to describe Raskolnikov’s life anymore because he—with the traces of sin wiped away—is free to create a new life. Truly, Raskolnikov is completely resurrected into a new life, experiencing a spiritual rebirth that delivers to him energy and hope. In *Crime and Punishment* Dostoevsky demonstrates the consequences of sin by revealing the suffering of isolation that Raskolnikov endures as evil persists in his character. Although there is a struggle between good and evil inside of Raskolnikov’s mind, the want to be righteous is not enough to deliver him from his sin. Through relying on himself, Raskolnikov suffers from the consequences of his sin and meanders through a long path in trying to take away the heavy and onerous burden of his sin. In the process of suffering, Raskolnikov realizes his own insignificance and sees that he, too, is in need of salvation. As Raskolnikov is unable to emancipate himself from the bondage of sin and guilt until he finally confesses his crime, Dostoevsky unveils that man is incapable of finding forgiveness through his own actions; only through the confession of sins can true salvation be found and the old life of sin be reborn into a new, free life.