

Sin: hawthorne's biblical truth

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In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne writes the consequences of one sinful act in a Puritan community. This sinful act involves three main characters, Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth. As *The Scarlet Letter* progresses, each character copes with his or her sin differently, and therefore the sin affects them differently. Shirley Guthrie writes, "There are three types of sin, 1) repentive sin, 2) unrepentive or hidden sin, and 3) deadly sin (7 types: lust, sloth, wrath, envy, gluttony, greed, and pride). All three can be forgiven by God's grace, but only through the asking in Jesus' Name"(pp. 105). Hawthorne allows *The Scarlet Letter* to be a backdrop, illuminating the truth of each character. This truth being that each character is a symbolic representation of one type of sin. Hester becomes repentive sin, Dimmesdale is unrepentive, and Chillingworth is deadly sin. As each character develops, so matures the sin, which they represent. Hester's adulterous affair, which is quickly discovered through her pregnancy, culminates in her wearing the symbolic representation of her sin, the scarlet A. Hester learns to find forgiveness of her sin through the trials of wearing the A. Hester becomes repentive sin to the reader. Like Hester, King David of the Bible was in an adulterous affair, yet he became one of God's greatest kings of the old testament. This was accomplished through humble confession of sin for forgiveness. David writes, "So I confessed my sins and told them all to You. I said, 'I'll tell the Lord each one of my sins.' Then you forgave me and took away my guilt"(Ps. 32: 5). David shows how the open confession of sin can free the sinner from the burden of guilt, but sin always has consequences. David watches his youngest son, born from the adulterous affair, die. Hester is forgiven by her repentive behavior, but still

finds her daughter an incarnate of her sin. Malcolm Cowley writes, "[Hester's] terror concerning her strange elvish child presents retribution in a form which is new and natural:—her slow and painful purification through repentance is crowned by no perfect happiness, such as awaits the decline of those who have no dark and bitter past to remember" (pp. 634). Hawthorne shows through Hester, how repentive sin, though forgiven, is always with us ~~is~~ an embodiment of our failure in living up to God's perfect law.

Dimmesdale is always hidden in the background of *The Scarlet Letter* ~~is~~ a shadowy character in pain. Hawthorne purposely does this to always keep on the reader's mind what he truly represents. Dimmesdale is unrepentive of hidden sin. He is the father of Pearl, yet his fear of the community keeps him from ever taking the step that Hester has taken. Dimmesdale hides his sin and it festers through his guilt. Dimmesdale begins to deteriorate. The Bible reads, "When I tell wicked people they will die because of their sins, and they do not [repent] their sinful ways, they must be punished. Now suppose faithful people start sinning, and I decide to put stumbling blocks in their paths to make them fall. They deserve to die because of their [unrepentive] sin" (Ezek. 3: 18-20). This passage shows the consequences of unrepentive sin, and the greater responsibility placed on the faithful. Dimmesdale is a biblical leader in the Puritan community, and as such, he faces a harsher punishment for his hidden sin. Henry James writes, "It is upon [Dimmesdale] that the author projects most frequently the cold, thin ray of his fitfully-moving lantern of guilt. ~~The~~ The idea of a mystic A which the young minister finds imprinted upon his breast and eating into his flesh" (pp. 108, 113).

When Hawthorne finally has his minister reveal his hidden sin, it is too late,

and he dies on the scaffold. Dimmesdale cannot escape his unrepentive sin, and it devours him whole. Hawthorne describes Chillingworth almost as Satan Himself. Chillingworth is a vengeful husband, who reappears with destruction on his mind, a conniving liar who becomes the embodiment of the Bible's seven deadly sins. He prides himself on his intellect and wealth. He lust after and envies Hester's youth. He is greedy to regain his lost property [Hester] or destroy in through his wrath. Chillingworth is Hawthorne's vision of evil. The Bible reads, "Rebelling against God or disobeying him because you are proud is just as bad as worshipping idols or asking them for advice"(1 Sam15: 23). Through pride, Chillingworth steps from God's grace and never looks back, he becomes a single-minded sinner. George Ripley writes, "[Chillingworth], who holds a principal place in the development of the plot, is depicted with such fearful directness and vigor that his infernal presence must long haunt the chambers of memory"(pp. 2). Chillingworth becomes the Devil, who hunts after Hester's immortal soul, and like that King of Darkness, must face God's judgment at the end of his life. The seven deadly sins, becomes the anchors that drag Chillingworth to Hell. Hawthorne's character glow with the power he imbues them with, they are sin and its judgment. The Bible reads, "Sin is what gives death its sting, and the Law is the power behind sin"(1 Cor. 15: 56). Simply put, no one need fear death that follows God's commandments, but for those who sin, death becomes fearful. None can escape death's grasp, but to the forgiven, it is the next step to immortality. As Paul once wrote to a newfound church, "Death, has lost the battle! Where is its victory? Where is its sting?"(1 Cor15: 54-55). Work Cited Contemporary English Version. "Holy Bible" American

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