

## **An Alien Among Us**

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Have you ever noticed all the personification in the Bible? Personification is a literary device in which the author gives human traits or actions to an inanimate object or to an abstract idea or even a spirit. Throughout the Bible, one interesting personification is that of sin. Sin is viewed in several passages almost like a force or a master. It is spoken of as if it were a human being that could act and react. But sin is not a person or even a spirit. It is an action, a thought, an attitude that does not glorify God or obey His divinely ordained principles.

We first see this kind of behavior in the book of Genesis. When Cain is unhappy with God's rejection of his sacrifices and Abel enjoys God's favor, Cain allows sin to grasp him and tell him what to do. In Genesis 4:6-7, God tells Cain after his countenance falls and He rejects the sacrifice that sin is crouching at the door and seeks to rule over or dominate him. Sin is not a person. It has no physical form. It can't crouch. It can't reign or rule over anything. It is what we call not obeying God.

And yet, the Lord gives to sin these abilities. Sin is crouching like a tiger waiting to strike. It is waiting for its opportunity to catch him off guard. It is hunting for prey. All of these are things that animated and living creatures can do. But an abstract idea cannot do these things. Death is also personified in Scripture. It is almost as if God's adversaries are not just Satan and his minions but also sin and death. These enemies are all defeated through Jesus'

death and resurrection. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 that God has won the victory over these powers through Christ.

In Genesis 4, sin has a desire to rule over Cain, like Adam's wife would desire to rule over him in marriage earlier in the book, and like Paul will say of sin and death reigning in our mortal bodies in Romans 6. Romans is another place where sin and death are given personified abilities. They are masters that rule over the human race because of Adam's disobedience. In Romans 6:9, sin and death are related to one another. Under the reign of spiritual death, sin also reigns in human hearts. Death and sin, two abstract ideas, are given personal attributes. Paul also gives the old person a personification, even though it is a representation of a former lifestyle.

Most of us would imagine that a literary device like personification would be most common among the poetry of the Bible, but it is used in deep theological discussion by Paul and as a starting point for Genesis in the first murder. To be sure, there is personification in other areas of the Bible. Wisdom is personified in the book of Proverbs as a beautiful and desirable lady, while folly is seen as a prostitute and vulgar woman. Wisdom and folly are ideas and abstract principles, not people. Lady wisdom calls in the market places and longs for the young man to whom Proverbs is written to search after her.

And yet many men seek after folly and are more accustomed to her whiles. Lady Wisdom comes to men at a premium, and the truth of the personification is not lost on us. Wisdom is hard to find no matter where we look. It is indeed more precious than riches or any other things we find because it can produce those things. Poetic and Wisdom literature often take advantage of these personification devices, and even the prophets are full of vivid imagery that can utilize personification as well. The art of personifying an object to show its nature and functions can impress any literary student.

James also uses personification, if we might be so bold as to call him the wisdom teacher of the New Testament. In James 1:14-15 outlines the way sin creeps into our lives. Sin is the one to tempt us, not God. It seeks to entice us and then lure us in. These two terms are hunting terms used to describe how to lay a trap or snare, and then entice with food in the trap to hunt the animal down, using its own desire for food against it. So also, James talks about how our own desires and passions can entice us to sin, and then lure us into the trap of sinning, which causes death. The connection between desire leading to sinning that causes death is only enhanced by personification of desire. We need not look to demonic influence or blame God for our sinfulness. We need only look inside of ourselves at our own passions and desires and ambitions.

Personification is an excellent literary tool in the hands of master storytellers and poets throughout Scripture. But we must not neglect its use by master theologians such as Paul and James. They do not use it for its abstract aesthetics, but for its connections to the very dangerous sins and deaths that are well on their way to us without Christ. Is sin a power or force? Is death a person or a

force on its own? Is Wisdom a woman or even perfectly represented in Christ? All of these questions take more seriously a literary device that is common throughout Scripture not just to envision an image, but to secure an understanding of sin and death.

Let us enjoy the literary devices of Scripture without neglecting the lessons such devices teach us about our life in Christ, the blessedness of His sacrifice and the effectiveness against every power that would seek our destruction. Let us praise God that whether or not these things are indeed powers or simply consequences and absences of good that no matter what their composition, He has been victorious over them, and we can have victory over them through obedience now, and the return of His Son soon!