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WHAT IS THE WORST SIN?

Wait a minute, doesn't the Bible say that all sins are equal? *Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.* (James 2:10-11)

But as I understand it, the Bible is telling us here and in many other places that God requires perfection (Jesus said, *Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.*), while all of us have missed the mark: *All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.* The Bible is telling us that we cannot please God, we cannot be saved, by our "good works," that we have to come to God by another way, the way of faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The Bible is not telling us that losing our temper and saying a cuss-word is equal to being a serial murderer. That would be nonsensical.

- If you agreed to watch over and protect a neighbor's cows and through your negligence one of them was lost or stolen, you were required to restore a cow to your neighbor.
- If you yourself stole a neighbor's cow and were found guilty by the court, you would be required to restore four-fold; that is, you would have to repay four cows to your neighbor.
- Numbers 15 prescribes different penalties if a person broke God's commandments unintentionally than if he broke them presumptuously.
- Penalties for different infractions vary from being publicly beaten with rods; to being required to sacrifice a bull to God as a burnt offering (and can you imagine how valuable a bull must have been); to being publicly stoned to death.
- All of this illustrates the fallacy that to God, in every instance, all sins are equal.

SINS OF IGNORANCE

In 1 Timothy 1:13, Paul says, *I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted His people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.* Paul did not claim that he was not responsible for the things he did, but he said that because he did those things in ignorance and unbelief it stirred up God's mercy toward him.

In Psalm 19, David prays, *Who can discern his errors? (NIV) or How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? (NLT).* He goes on, *Keep your servant also from willful sins, may they not rule over me.* The NLT words it: *Keep your servant from deliberate sins!*

Don't let them control me. Boy, there is much insight in that prayer. David perceives that there is a lot of difference between sins of ignorance (or mistakes), and deliberate, willful sins done in defiance of God. And he warns us that such willful sins will exact a terrible price: they will inevitably come to dominate us so that we lose our freedom. You can see the reality of that warning in the lives of people addicted to alcohol, drugs, sexual sins, gambling, etc.

WILLFUL, DELIBERATE SINS

You will recall that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, who was engaged to Mary, and said, *And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall name him Jesus* (which means Savior), *for he will save his people from their sins.* (Matt. 1:21) There are some Christians in our era who seem to think that Jesus came to save them "in their sins," not "from their sins." Big mistake! There are some really scary warnings in the New Testament about this subject:

- Romans 2:1-9. *Do you think, O man, that you will escape the judgment of God if you continue to practice those things? (those sins listed in chapter 1). God will render to each one according to his deeds; eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor and immortality; but to those who do not obey the truth – indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish....*
- Hebrews 10:26-31 – *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire will consume the enemies of God.....*
- 2 Peter 2:20-22 – *If they escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.....*

WORSE SINS

Several sins in the Bible are categorized as “worse” sins.

- In 2 Peter 2:20, above, if people go back into sins from which they had previously been delivered, they are “worse off,” so obviously when a Christian sins in that way they are “worse” sins. Right?
- 1 Timothy 5:8 – *If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* In these days of rampant drug addiction, we have all known of fathers and mothers who have abandoned their own children. We have also known of grown sons and daughters who have abandoned their aged parents. God declares that if Christians do those things they are “worse than an unbeliever.”
- Causing others to sin. *Worse yet, they cause others to sin.* This verse follows a list of sins somewhere in the New Testament. (You will have to take my word for it, I can’t find the Scripture reference after much searching. Help me out here, guys!)

CAUSING OTHERS TO SIN

- Ro. 14:13 – *Decide to live in such a way that you will not cause others to stumble and fall.*
- 1 Cor. 8:12 – *When you sin against other believers by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, you sin against Christ.*
- Matt. 18:6 – *If you cause one of these little ones who believe in me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the sea.*

THE WORST SIN OF ALL

The worst sin of all is undoubtedly the “unforgivable” sin. In Matthew 12, the Pharisees said that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the Prince of demons. Jesus said that *Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but that whoever blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or the age to come.* The scholars of the New Living Testament explain it this way: “One may stumble over Jesus’ mysterious revelation of himself as Son of Man and be forgiven, but one cannot be forgiven for attributing the work of the Spirit to Satan. The present day analogy is the outright rejection of the conviction of the Holy Spirit concerning Christ - - that is, the ultimate rejection of the Good News by an unbeliever.”

THE GOOD NEWS AFTER THE BAD NEWS

The great good news is that Jesus shed his blood and died on the cross so that we might be forgiven by our Heavenly Father. God tells us about the danger of sin because sin leads to death. But Jesus took our sin and our death and gifted us with forgiveness and eternal life. And Romans tells us that Jesus not only paid the penalty for our sins but broke the power of sin over our life so that we can be free. (Romans 6)

So let's close by remembering a little song from the past:

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way,
To be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey.*

A TALKING GOD?

Right after Billy Graham died, I read somewhere that the ladies on The View were talking about him, and one of the ladies said, "When people talk to God, that's called prayer. When people hear God talking to them, that's called psychosis." Ha! I'll just bet that most all the people who get my monthly teaching are plenty psychotic. Right? Count me in.

The Bible tells us about a talking God. The Bible says, "God said," or "Thus saith the Lord" over 2,000 times! Psalm 94:9 says, *Is he deaf - the one who made your ears? Is he blind - the one who formed your eyes?*

I have a little cell group of about 10 or 12 people who meet on Thursday evenings, discuss the past Sunday's message, and pray for one another. During one of our recent meetings I quizzed them on different ways God has talked to them in the past. The responses were interesting and surprising. I asked, "How many of you have "heard" God speak to you from:

The Bible? There were 10 of us there that night, and everyone raised their hands.

In your heart? Again, everyone said yes.

In dreams or visions? I think four or five raised their hands, and we had an interesting discussion of how to know whether a dream or vision is from God, the devil, or our imagination.

Audibly? I didn't expect anyone to say yes to this one, but there were two definites and one maybe. The maybe said that in a time of terrible stress she heard God speak so loud that she couldn't tell whether it was external or internal.

In sermons? Everyone said yes.

In conversations, when through a casual statement by someone God seemed to be saying something pertinent directly to your heart? Several said yes.

Through casual life experiences, similar to the question about conversations? Again, several said yes.

Through animals? I shared that when I sit on my patio on many mornings and read the Word and hear doves cooing, it feels like God is telling me how much he loves me. (If God can speak through a donkey)

Through physical touch? Again I didn't expect any affirmations, but one lady said that in a time of grief and turmoil she felt a loving hand on her back. One of our men said that not long ago as he praised God with his hands in the air he felt Someone take his hand firmly in His own. Wow!

A young man (anyone less than 70 is young to me, but this guy is really young, only about 40) had a great story about God's physical touch. He said that several years ago he started feeling so guilty about some of his past sins that he concluded he didn't deserve to live, that he should die because of his sins. He said to God, "Please, just take my life because of my sins." He felt as if his soul was drifting away from his body, when suddenly he felt a really painful slap on his bottom. Then God addressed him: "How dare you! I gave my Son to die for your sins, now you are telling me that you need to die for your sins! Don't you ever say anything like that again!" He repented, and felt warm and loved and forgiven.

Isaiah 30:21 says, *Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."*

Wow! What a fabulous promise.

Are we Christians suffering a massive delusion? Are we playing mind-games? Or is the great Creator God of the universe personally interested in our lives and does He talk to us and lead us during this great adventure of life? Amen to His talking to us. Amen and Amen!

PRISON MNISTRY

I had the opportunity on the first weekend in June to teach a part of my Pathway to Freedom seminar at the men's prison in Delta. My teaching schedule was:

On Friday evening:

- 1) Introduction and my testimony
- 2) The heart. It has hidden Wounds, Sins, and Lies. God wants our heart! He can heal it, forgive it, and cleanse it.
- 3) Overcoming anger.

On Saturday morning:

- 1) The power of words to bless or curse, to kill or to give life.
- 2) Overcoming self-condemnation and seeing ourselves as God sees us
- 3) Forgiving is essential - - forgiving others, God, and ourselves.

On Saturday afternoon:

- 1) At their regular worship service, about 60 guys attended, and their band and group singing was truly as outstanding and blessed presentation to God as I have ever heard. Man, they are great.
- 2) Dealing with the wounds of Trauma Followed by prayer for God to heal all the trauma victims.
 - 3) A brief teaching on Generational Curses, Witchcraft curses, Ungodly soul-ties, and Demonization.
 - 4) Teaching on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, followed by prayer for the men to receive this blessing from Jesus along with the gift of tongues
 - 5) Personal ministry to individual men for over an hour.
 - 6) Due to time restrictions, some of my teachings were really proscribed, so I left a Zerox copy of all my teachings with the Chaplain who said he would copy and make them available for study. (The Chaplain is an outstanding man.)

I truly love those guys, and this ministry is the most enjoyable thing I ever do. It is also totally exhausting for a guy approaching retirement age. (Following is a recapitulation of my teaching on anger.)

DEALING WITH ANGER

I'm going to teach a little about anger this morning. How many of you guys would say that anger had something to do with your being sentenced to prison? (Nearly everyone raised their hand.) Anger is a really important subject.

Anger can destroy your life!

Is anger a sin? Not always. Ephesians 4:26-27 (NIV) says, *In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.* When we get angry, and we will, we are to deal with it in the right way or it allows the devil to invade our space. Jesus was angry some times, a righteous anger (as when he drove the money-changers out of the temple), but he did not sin.

Anger is human. Jesus said, *“Offenses will come.”* People will offend us by their words or actions, and our reaction will either be what the devil wants or what God wants:

The Devil wants:

Offense - - Anger - - Unforgiveness - - Bitterness - - Hatred Vengeance - - Murder

Unforgiveness is the seed of murder! Really?

Have you ever been filled with bitterness and hatred toward someone? In your heart, didn't you really want them to die?

From the beginning, this sequence has been a problem for mankind. Think of the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4.

God wants:

Offense - - Anger - - Forgiveness - - Work it out with the other person - - Peace

Jesus teaches us how to work out offenses with others beginning at Matthew 18:15, but the point is that we are not to just stuff our offense and anger - - we are to go to the person and talk it out with him, if possible. Yes, you must forgive, but you must also communicate and talk things out. Otherwise, if you stuff your anger you will either implode or explode. *Proverbs 10:12 says, Love covers all offenses.*

In all the hotels in Southern California you will find a little warning pasted on the bathroom mirror: “Instructions in case of an earthquake.” If you had no past information about California you might read that warning and then look out of a window at the traffic and wonder why they posted that warning. But everyone knows that in California, below the surface, there is a FAULT LINE (actually, a web of fault lines), including the San Andreas Fault. The tectonic plates, which are slowly and inexorably grinding into each other, are building up tremendous pressure and tension. After decades or centuries of pressure, it can release with tremendous power.

Some people are just like that land in California. On the surface they appear normal and friendly, but beneath the surface there is a

fault line. Pressure is slowly building, and you had better not be standing close to them when they explode. That's what happens in cases of road-rage.

Several years ago I was in a Walmart, pushing a grocery cart down an aisle, when I glanced at a guy I had just passed. He looked like a skin-head, with tattoos and ear-rings stuck all over his face, he was very muscular, and he was glaring at me like he wanted to kill me. I had apparently pushed my cart in front of his and deserved to die. A newspaper headline appeared in my imagination: "Saintly retired pastor murdered in case of grocery-cart rage."

If you were raised in a home where there was anger, exploding, cursing, slapping, hitting, there might be a fault-line in your foundation and the right circumstance can result in an earthquake.

A pastor named Larry Huck tells about his life: Before he became a Christian, Larry was a drug dealer in California and was so successful that he moved to Colombia to establish his own drug network. He was making millions of dollars. He also started using his own product until it almost killed him. He overdosed three times. He went from a

muscular 210 lbs. down to 135 lbs. He moved back to Arizona and became a homeless druggie. One day he wandered into a mission church, felt the presence of God, accepted Christ, and turned his life around. Hallelujah!

Flash forward five years: Larry went through a Bible school and became pastor of a successful church. One evening he got angry at his wife, who was eight-months pregnant, and knocked her down. He kicked his little boy, Luke, who was three or four-years old, and bounced him off the wall. A memory instantly came to Larry's mind. He said, "Oh, my gosh, I'm just like my dad!" Tears, deep repentance, a process of deep ministry and healing, and now Larry and his wife have a great ministry of "setting the captives free." His three grown children are all in Christian ministry. He is free, but it was a painful and costly and time-consuming process.

Larry's back-story and mine are very similar, except his is much more dramatic. I was a Methodist minister, outwardly successful, but inwardly there was a big fault line. I was addicted to alcohol, porn, and full of anger toward my wife. God, in His mercy, did some divine surgery. It was intense, terribly painful, and lasted for years and years and years. Peter said, *He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.* (1 Peter 4:1)

There is no short-cut if we want to be free and a follower of Jesus.

Let me close by making some statements about anger that I believe are Scriptural and true:

(A) You and I are not doomed to a lifetime of anger and

bitterness. God loves us and wants to heal us and set us free.

And He has the power to do that if we will do our part.

(B) Anger is an emotion. And it is a choice. We have a choice when we are offended. We can yield to anger and its consequencesor we can choose to stop and think and yield to God. *A man's wisdom gives him patience. It is his glory to overlook an offense.* (Prov. 19:11)

(C) Anger is a test! How are you going to choose to respond?

(D) In some cases, anger is a way that people choose to control others: husbands, fathers, bosses, tyrants. “Be careful what you say or Dad will explode!” That is an aspect of witchcraft! Watch out! You may be using the same technique the devil uses.

(E) Anger is not only an emotion, some times it is a spirit, a demonic spirit. Have you ever seen someone who when angry becomes completely out of control? Their face twists, their eyes get red, their teeth are bared? This can happen at sports events when a crowd can become a murderous mob. It happened in a church at Nazareth when a congregation rose up and tried to throw Jesus off a high cliff. It can happen in politics. It can happen easily in a bar or a night club, fueled by alcohol and drugs.

(F) There is a saying, “You can’t cast out an emotion, and you can’t heal a demon!” Each must be dealt with in a Scriptural way. Are you willing to submit to Jesus and be healed and set free of out-of-control anger? It will be costly. Forgive, repent, renounce, command demonic spirits of anger/murder/suicide to leave in the name of Jesus.

God loves you. He gave his Son to save you and set you free. Turn to Him with all your heart.

God Bless

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I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry.

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