

## **The Journey of Transformation** Raymond L. Fox

*Something to reflect on, comment on, and even practice on your journey.*



### **What Is Sin, Really?**

These are the words of the lost son when he returned to his father and admitted he had made a horrible mistake in leaving his father. He had gone to a far country and wasted his inheritance on scandalous living (Luke 15:11-21). But the young man's sin that made him unworthy to be called his father's son must have begun to develop long before he left home. Take a moment to review the story in the fifteenth chapter of Luke and ask yourself where the young man first went wrong.

The word "sin" literally means to miss the mark. Imagine shooting at a target and missing. In the case of the lost son, what was the target he missed? His words, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son," give us a clue. He missed the target for being a son. He had thought that being a son meant to inherit whatever one's father possesses. For this reason he had believed his demand, "Give me my inheritance!" was completely justified. Long before he left home, he had failed to understand what the target for being a son was.

To be a son means to be like your father, to reflect his heart and mind. The young man's father was generous, even uncommonly generous to his servants to whom he provided abundant food. We discover from the story that the father was patient, compassionate, forgiving, and a peacemaker. The son was none of these. He was selfish, thinking only of what might satisfy the desire of his own heart, without regard for how his actions would

affect others, especially his father. He had seriously missed the mark of reflecting his father's gracious, unconditional love.

Jesus also taught his followers that being a child of God means to be like our heavenly Father. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). He also said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:44-45).

In plain language, God is love (1 John 4:16) and selfishness, the precise opposite of love, is to miss the mark for being children of God. Sin is selfishness: to put self in the center of our heart and at the top of our priorities. If you doubt this definition for sin, have a look at the list of sins in Colossians 3:5-9 and Galatians 5:19-20 and consider how each of them is fundamentally focused on providing power, control, and pleasure to self instead of loving others with the gracious love of our Father. Even witchcraft, which appears on the list in the Galatians passage, originates from a selfish desire to exercise power over and control the outcomes of natural laws. The use of "filthy language" that Paul includes in the Colossians passage is also a selfish expression of power without concern about offending others.

Can we think of every sin as some form or expression of self-centeredness that is opposed to the love of our Father? Thinking of sin as selfishness certainly brings clarity and practicality to a word that has come to mean so many different things to different people that now it means very little to anyone. It also shows us the clear path back to the Father by learning to love others as he loves us.

#### **About Raymond**

Raymond L. Fox has been teaching about transformation in the image of Jesus for forty-five years, in the U.S. and abroad. He has written four books: *Love God, Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength*, *Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*, *The Transformed Church*, and *The Fruit of the Spirit*. His work also includes character counseling and mentoring in juvenile detention facilities. He has degrees in philosophy and education.



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