

## What Is Sin? And Why Does It Matter So Much?

1. Warm up: What's one of the best things that's happened to you in the past week? (It doesn't have to be something monumental, just something good that happened.)
2. On Sunday we continued our sermon series on the "Dark Side of Spiritual Life" by grappling with the definition of "sin." In other words, what makes something a sin? Who gets to decide? And how? If asked to define sin, most people would say that sin is breaking the rules, especially religious rules. But Jeff suggested that defining sin that way not only contradicts the Bible, but also sets us up for all kinds of pitfalls.
  - a. For starters, nobody alive in the world today keeps all the rules. For example, most Christians don't observe the following Biblical rules: no tattoos, women must be silent in church, women shouldn't have short hair and men shouldn't have long hair, no work on the Sabbath, and never eat pork. How many of the five rules just listed do you believe should be observed? If someone were to ask you why you disregard these five Biblical rules, what would you say?
  - b. Jeff pointed out that even Jesus didn't keep all the rules. In fact, he repeatedly deliberately broke many rules. Examples include: saying it's ok to eat pork and other unclean foods (Mk. 7:18), working on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:9), exempting an adulteress from the Biblical death penalty (Jn. 8:11), associating with "unclean people" (Lk. 19:5), and saying it's ok to not pay the Biblically prescribed temple tax (Mt. 17:26). How does it make you feel to hear that Jesus broke so many Biblical rules? What do you think he was trying to teach us?
  - c. Have someone read aloud each of the following verses. When each verse is read, have someone summarize in their own words what they think the verse means.  
Romans 6:14      Romans 7:6      Galatians 5:18      II Corinthians 3:6
  - d. Note especially the phrase in that last verse that says "the letter [of the Law] kills." What do you think that means? Why is rigid mindless application of religious rules so potentially deadly?
  - e. When in your life (or the life of someone you know) have you seen a religious rule applied in a way that resulted in great harm. What motivated the person in question to insist on keeping the rule even though it was harmful?
  - f. Brandi Carlile, a Grammy award winning singer/songwriter, is an example of what can happen when religious rules are rigidly, mindlessly applied. As a teenager she fell in love with Jesus and wanted to be baptized. But on the day of her baptism, the church told her she couldn't go forward with baptism unless she renounced her sexual orientation as a Lesbian. Ever since then, Brandi has turned away from church. What motivation or misconception propelled Brandi's church to do what they did?

3. Based on the verses we've already discussed and the example of Jesus himself, Jeff asserted that the Bible itself rejects the definition of sin as breaking the rules. That then raises a key question. How does the Bible define sin? The Hebrew word for "sin" is *chatta* [pronounced *hat-TAW*], which literally means "missing the mark," as when an archer shoots an arrow that misses the bullseye on the target. That then raises another question. What does the bullseye on the target represent? Jeff suggested the answer is found in two key verses.
  - a. Ephesians 5:1 says, "Be ye imitators of God, as dear children." I John 4:8 says, "God is love." When we put these two verses together, what does that tell us about what we're supposed to do and what we're not supposed to do?
  - b. From the foregoing two verses, Jeff drew the conclusion that the right thing to do, in any given situation, is the loving thing to do. When we fail to do that, we "miss the mark." In other words, the bullseye in any situation we find ourselves in is love – to act in love as we are guided by the Spirit. To not do so is to miss the mark. In other words, sin (Biblically defined) is any thought or action that is unloving. Do you find this line of reasoning and the definition of sin that results compelling? Why or why not?
  - c. Have someone read aloud each of the following verses. When each verse is read, have someone summarize in their own words what they think the verse means.
 

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| Ephesians 5:1-2 | I John 4:11-12   | Galatians 5:13 | Colossians 3:14 |
| Romans 13:8     | Matthew 22:37-40 | John 15:12     |                 |
  - d. When you put all the foregoing verses together, what's the message you draw from them?
  - e. In every instance where Jesus broke a Biblical rule, Jeff asserted, he did so because love compelled him. It's for that reason, for example, Jesus healed on the Sabbath, and refused to permit the adulteress to be stoned, and insisted on associating with "unclean" people. Tell us about a time when you (or someone you know) deliberately departed from a religious rule because love compelled you (or them) to do so.
  - f. The point of all this is not that rules are bad. Rules can be quite helpful because they can often help us figure out the most loving thing to do. But rules should never be allowed to compel us to do something unloving. Because, in the final analysis, sin is not about breaking rules, it's any thought or action that's unloving. Tell us about a time when you (or someone you know) rigidly applied a religious rule in a way that you now regard as misguided and harmful.
  - g. Although we are called to act in love, we all often fall short of the mark. We all sin. The point of the Biblical definition of sin is not to condemn us, but to call us

to beautiful, lifegiving lives. And when we do sin, God forgives us, thereby modeling the very love God calls us to embrace. How does this “new” way of seeing sin that we’ve discussed tonight sit with you? Does it make sense? Is it helpful? Why or why not?