

A Sin Is a Sin!?

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“A sin is a sin!” I have heard that statement all my life used to make the point that sin is a universal problem (Rom. 3:23) that always results in spiritual death to those involved (Rom. 6:23). We know that, biblically speaking, there is no such thing as a so-called “little white” lie. A lie is a lie! All lies result in being thrown into a lake of fire (Rev. 21:8). This is a lesson that we need to learn when we are tempted to define sins as “little” sins and “big” sins. As humans, we tend to think of “big” sins as the ones *you* commit and “little” sins as the ones that *I* commit. Yet all sin separates us from God (Isa 59:2). Therefore, anytime someone tries to make light of sin or tell you about how a sin is not that bad, they are teaching something that is straight out of hell (John 8:44).

All Sins Condemn, but not All Sins Carry the Same Consequence

Strangely enough, in recent years the idea that “a sin is a sin” has actually been used as a tool to justify sin. People have pointed to supposed inconsistencies in the way Christians handle sin or rank one sin over another. While the Bible does not make a distinction in regard to the results of sin, it does make distinctions among sins in regard to the physical impact and the way the church is expected to react.

Paul wrote to Timothy, “But 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*" (1 Tim. 5:8, emp. added). Obviously, Paul is not saying that being an unbeliever is a good thing. He is saying that when we claim to be believers without caring for our widows, we are doing more harm than those who make no such claim. It is terrible when a man goes out to the bar drinking on Saturday night. It is even worse when that individual gets up to lead in worship the next morning. There is a difference in the impact of their sin.

Peter writes about those who turn away from the Lord after walking with Him saying, "The latter end is *worse* for them than the beginning. For it would have been *better* for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the Holy Commandment" (2 Peter 2:20-21, emp. added). Once again, Peter is not saying in any way that it is a good thing for people not to know the way of righteousness. You will be lost in that state. He is saying it is even worse to know and then turn your back (Luke 12:47-48). This distinction in regard to the results of sin and how the church responds to it is important for us to recognize in the face of many who want to use the universality of sin as an excuse for not speaking out against any sin.

Yes, We Were at One Time Sinners, but Let's Never Be Content with Staying That Way

Some are fond of using the phrase "we're all sinners" as a justification for sin. They say this, implying that since we all sin we should not really be surprised or upset by the sin that surrounds us. May it never be! This is not what the Bible teaches. It is true that we are all sinners if what you mean by that statement is we all struggle with sin and none of us have achieved perfection (James 3:2; 1 John 1:8). However, it is not true that we are all sinners if what you mean by that statement is there is no difference in the life of one who is in Christ and one who is outside of Christ. The Bible continually teaches the idea of a man being either a sinner or a saint. Christians err when they forget the significance of either of these words. Anytime a Christian finds sin in his life it is always unacceptable, and it ought to grieve us.

In Romans 6 some thought that the grace and salvation of God could somehow be used as a justification for sin. The same arguments are still being made today. Paul's response was, "God forbid!" (Rom. 6:2). If that is what you think, you have missed the whole point of the gospel. His explanation is that "our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should not longer be slaves to sin" (Rom. 6:6). This means that sin is not an acceptable part of the Christian life. When it does still present itself in all of our lives, it should frustrate us as children of God. Even the apostle Paul saw sin in his life the he did not want to be there. His response? "O wretched man that I am" (Rom. 7:24)!

Like Paul, we've got to be so humbled, so humiliated, by our own sin that we turn to Christ as the only one who can set us free.

Any Sin Can Damn You, but Some Sins Are more Egregious than Others

Others believe that we should never make a big deal over any sin because it is just one of many sins that are committed every day. Of course, Paul stood against all sin, but he did seem to call out certain sins as tipping points of worldliness.

The clearest example of this is found in 1 Corinthians 5 where he is addressing the issue of a man who had his father's wife. In verse 1 he says, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles." The point is that there are certain sins that ought to receive our attention because their presence and acceptance signals a shift in values both of a church and our society.

One example of this in my lifetime came in the form of Ellen DeGeneres. In 1998 her sitcom *Ellen* was canceled after she came out as gay both on screen and in her personal life. By 2003 she was back on television, ultimately hosting one of the most popular daytime talk shows in America. This was actually acknowledged as she was awarded a Presidential Medal of Honor in 2016. Some people argued that Christians should not be overly concerned about her homosexual lifestyle because there is plenty of sin in Hollywood. Many people both on and off screen are involved in all sorts of adultery, fornication, alcoholism, etc. Her sin is not worse than those sins. While it is true that this sin has the same consequence as those sins, we should not overlook the fact that this sin's acceptance marked a turning point in the way our society viewed sin.

These "worldly sins" both in the church and society indicate a drift further away from the light of Jesus Christ. We must consistently stand against both those sins with which we have grown familiar and those sins that are a new frontier for our society. May we never cease being scandalized by those new frontiers!

Sometimes There Are Limitations to How Sin Can Be Dealt with in the Church

At times, when a congregation exercises discipline as prescribed in the New Testament, there will be those who object to this practice. They argue that we only see churches

exercising discipline in regard to sins such as adultery, stealing, false teaching, or forsaking the assembly, but we never see churches exercising discipline in regard to sins such as pride, lust, or anger. The point is well taken, and I would be naive to try and claim that sins such as pride, lust, or anger don't exist in our congregations. However, what the one making the objection fails to consider is that there is a distinction between sins that are observable or empirically verifiable and those that are not.

Let me illustrate. If someone commits adultery, I can go to that person with a concern that at a specific time, on a specific day, at a specific location, and with a specific person they committed a specific act. Some have even been known to have photographic evidence of this sin. When it comes to sins like greed, it would be difficult to produce any of those specifics. That does not mean that it does not happen. It probably happens with a greater frequency than adultery. It just means that I can not easily quantify those less obvious sins. Paul tells Timothy, "Some men's sins are clearly *evident*, preceding them to judgment; but those of some men follow later" (1 Tim. 5:24, emp. added). There are some things only God knows, but we can rest assured that He does know. Both obvious sins and not quite-so-obvious sins are equally sinful. Our inability to deal with sins of the heart does not negate or excuse our responsibility to deal with sins that are quite evident.

Conclusion

Yes, a sin is a sin. Doubtless, all sin comes with the sentence of death (Rom. 6:23). In that sense, there is not such thing as a "big" sin or a "little" sin. Christians must be opposed to all sin, starting with the sin in our own lives. Those sins are what put Jesus on the cross, and anyone who would proclaim a message that ever downplays the consequence of sin should be noted. As strange as it may seem, some have even taken this universality of sin to try and justify or minimize sinful activity. This comes from a failure to understand that not all sins are treated the same in regard to man's reaction or the impact they have in society. Christians must think carefully about our response to sin and constantly and consistently point this lost world and ourselves toward the only solution--the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:13).