

Sin And Overcoming (Part 1): If Anyone Sins!

What Is Sin ?

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I have mentioned to some of you about a man that I worked with about twenty-five years ago at the makers of Noxzema and Covergirl products. At that time I worked in the Engineering office and it was located in the manufacturing plant. There was a man named Barney who I use sometimes as an example because he was a prime example of the man who wore his human nature on his shirtsleeves. Barney was a very likeable guy; if you met him you would be reminded of Buddy Hackett. Barney was about the height of Barney Rubble on the Flintstones. He was a very humorous man. It was around Christmas time and the company was going to have a party in the afternoon so I was working in the morning and just getting ready to leave. Just before I left at about noon, Barney comes rolling in with one of those carts they use in a warehouse and he had a fifty-five gallon drum on the back of it. As he rolled up into the machine shop he said, "my wife said that I can have one drink, so fill it up!" This helps to give us an idea of the way the world thinks about things like sin and so forth.

Even the world recognizes certain things as wrong. However, they rarely call them sins. Some of what Christianity calls sin the world calls a criminal act, wrongdoing, illegal behavior, unlawful activity, lawbreaking or any number of other legal terms.

Society has always recognized transgressing at least some of the Ten Commandments as bad behavior. But of course society goes to great lengths to not admit that the authority for what makes such things as murder, stealing and adultery wrong behavior is God and His laws. Generally speaking, murder, stealing and adultery are recognized as wrong conduct almost anywhere in the world.

God has plainly instilled in every human being a basic "sense of right and wrong."

Romans 1:18-19 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

God has instilled a sense of right and wrong in every individual. He shows it to them.

John 1:9-10 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

Even though God has instilled a sense of right and wrong in every human being, it still does not give them the knowledge or the sense of who Christ and His Father are.

God had endowed human beings with reason and conscience through the One who later became Christ.

Romans 2:14-15 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, [Whether a person rejects God's law or not, they are still governed by them.] who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.

Their conscience and thoughts naturally sinned against God's law which deep down they knew, because God has instilled a sense of right and wrong in every last human being. He made every human being capable of seeing and investigating his works. He spread before them the proofs of His wisdom, goodness, power and inherent laws, and in this way gave them the means of learning at least the basics of how they should live.

For members of God's church the standard of righteous living is much higher than what the world recognizes as right attitude and good behavior. In comparison, generally the world has only recognized and been concerned with the behavior side of lawbreaking as it applies to others. They do not recognize it usually as it applies to them.

Society's view of lawbreaking does not really care about the thought process involved in why a person did it. The world usually does not care about whether a suspect has hate in his heart when passing judgment on a murder case. It does not care if a man lusted after another woman in a divorce trial. Man's law primarily deals with 'the letter' of the law.

Members of God's church, however, must be concerned with not only conduct, but at least as importantly, the heart and mind behind the behavior. Notice what Christ tells us:

Matthew 5:21-22 You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

'Raca' is an expression of contempt. It literally in the Greek means 'empty head.' Today we might say idiot, imbecile or moron. 'You fool' is an expression of spiritual contempt. This would be character assassination and wishing condemnation on another individual. You can see where it rises to another level. In fact, the original Greek is similar to the word 'more' in than English language. So it is saying that if you say more than 'Raca' in one sense then you are guilty of the danger of hell fire.

Matthew 5:27-28 You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a

woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

We assume that all mature Christians are no longer guilty of the letter of God's Law. At least we hope we are no longer guilty of breaking the commandments of God by our behavior. Therefore, as we mature as Christians, our concentration and our emphasis shifts more and more toward overcoming the spiritual side of sin. We are held to a higher standard.

What is our mindset in living God's way of life according to His law of love? Why should we not sin? These seem like simple questions.

There are certain periods in our lives—significant birthdays and anniversaries, especially as we near Passover—then we find ourselves thinking about life itself, its whole purpose and goal. We think about ourselves, wondering what we have made of life. There is no doubt in my mind that every one of us has gone through this thought process; at least we should have before every Passover.

What are we doing with it and what is the ultimate future that is very steadily facing us all?

Probably, quite inevitably, we also look backwards, reflecting and wondering how we have conducted ourselves up to now. In addition, probably we are all aware of a sense of dissatisfaction with what we have done with our life thus far.

Inescapably, we realize that we have not done as well as we should have. Neither have we accomplished what we intended to do. We are aware of a sense of failure and inadequacy, and at the same time we have a desire to do better in the future.

Those are the feelings that tend to come to the forefront of our minds as we pause at any significant time in life and look backwards and forward. Maybe the most important thing of all is that we should be very clear about our purpose and goal in life itself. If we do not have a purpose and goal we do not have a direction and we will not get anywhere.

The danger with resolutions that often follow such reflections is that they are resolutions with regard to specific things. However, we often fail to be concerned about the most important principles behind those things we may want to change.

The problem is that we deal with the symptoms instead of the disease, and that is a mistake as we look back and review the past. We tend to quickly look at the details of our actions before we have really considered the foundational principles themselves.

Even the few times that a person may consider a principle behind the resolution, it is from a skewed viewpoint. For example a person in the world might say, "I resolve to assume full responsibility for my actions, except the ones that are someone else's fault." That seems to be the way many human beings view things.

It has always been a great challenge not to let life master us. That is, we cannot afford to let the pressures of life dictate the direction of our lives. We all tend to become victims of circumstances, chance and accident.

Something significant will take place: a birth, a death, an illness, an accident, or war, or

something devastating, and we pause to begin to contemplate our lives. As things heat up in the Middle East it no doubt is a stimulus to encourage us look more deeply into our personal lives.

We are again conscious of this sense of dissatisfaction and uneasiness about ourselves, and we intend to do something about it. We are genuinely determined to do so and then, somehow or another, that heightened alert passes. In a few days we are back again exactly where we were at the beginning.

Now that is a fairly close description of the life of the average person—aware from time to time of something essentially wrong, then analyzing only our behavior and activities instead of the spiritual problem. The inevitable result is that the main mood of life continues more or less as it was before. Nothing essential has been changed. We have all seen that in some individuals who have attended God's church for thirty, forty, fifty years. They never seem to produce any real fruit in their lives.

We find God expresses that He is very concerned about all of that. In fact, it is an important concern, and He has a remedy for the problem. According to Holy Scripture, the thing that matters is that we should be in a right relationship with God. This is something I emphasize often.

One of the ways in which the Bible differs from the great law books of the world which heap up dos and don'ts so specific that the people are oppressed by the sheer volume of the details of the legal material. The Bible is primarily a book of great principles.

Matthew 5:43-44 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

Although the Bible does cover some details, it primarily has a main emphasis on essential principles as we see here, and actually all the way through the fifth chapter of Matthew. God knew people would try to improve themselves, but He tells us that it will benefit nothing because we are ignoring the foundation and we are treating the symptoms. We forget that the trouble is at the source—the most important thing of all is our relationship to God.

Until we do come back to that true and right relationship, nothing will benefit us. We can improve ourselves here and there, but if we are essentially wrong, finally we will be totally wrong.

That is the point. That is the theme of the Bible from beginning to end, and the ways in which the Bible puts that message are almost endless. The principles in the Bible are presented in plain and direct teaching, but we also receive the principles in illustrations of the people that it puts before us. We should thank God for these biblical characters and illustrations are living representations of its doctrine and teaching.

Take the faithful in Hebrews 11, for example. They are just a few of the list of names that we have in the Bible. These were men and women who were in this world exactly as we are, subject to the same challenges, subject to the same things that tend to happen to us in a world

like this. Yet, as we look at them, we have to admit that there was something exceptional and outstanding about them.

They were people who seemed to be triumphant in life, and their secret, according to the Bible, was only one thing. It was their relationship with God.

These men and women were independent of their circumstances and were what they were because they were intimately connected with God in a right relationship. They suffered terrible trials, they endured adversity in its extreme form, yet we cannot look at them without seeing that they were people who had a faith, a love and a hopefulness which nothing could destroy.

When we look at their lives we see things going wrong all around them. Yet we see them going steadily forward—persevering while suffering. And the author of Hebrews says the reason was their faith. Faith is being in the right relationship to God, knowing Him.

Hebrews 11 tells us that Moses' secret was that he went on enduring as seeing Him who is invisible.

Hebrews 11:24-27 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

So he had what kids may call x-ray vision. He could see right into the way God lived.

It was because these people were in a right relationship with God that they were made independent of circumstances, chance, conditions and surroundings.

Essentially, this places us in the upbeat position of being more or less spiritually independent of circumstances, accidents, chance and the environment we live in—anything that may happen. It does not try to improve these challenges; it puts us right. If we have the right relationship with God, we will more easily manage negative circumstances, so it always brings us back to that essential issue of our relationship with our Almighty Supreme God.

If we have this faith, when we are presented and confronted by a choice, which we cannot quite understand, we will not hesitate to rise to the occasion. It is God who raises us to the occasion.

Someday we may be called upon to do things which the average human being would find devastating or impossible. Yet to us, because we are in a right relationship with God, He will provide us with what we need in understanding and courage through the Holy Spirit to stand up to it. The Apostle John deals with that thing in I John 2:

I John 2:1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

John had taught the church for many years and saw them confronted by difficulties, problems, trials and tribulations. This was his fatherly advice to them. As John looked at those people, and as he looked back across his own life, he saw there are two main dangers that always confront us.

Writing here to Christians he said the first danger is that of complacency, and the other is the exact opposite, the danger of hopelessness. The danger is compromise on the one hand and depression on the other. The trouble with most of us is that we tend to oscillate between these two.

In certain moods and states we are very complacent. We say we are all right, but in the next moment we are feeling completely hopeless and full of despair.

It is very difficult for the average person to maintain an even keel, to keep balance, just to be steady, strong and sure, avoiding those extremes that are always there confronting us. We call a person who bounces all over the place with his emotions "emotionally unstable."

That is John's diagnosis. He provides something for that very possibility. He divides his message into: command and comfort, exhortation and consolation, objective and promise. And the two parts are: what you and I do and what God in His infinite wisdom and grace is always ready to do for us.

These are the two things we must always bear in mind if we are anxious to enjoy that right relationship with God. John quite often calls this true fellowship with God. We should always be walking with God and we should always be maintaining that relationship. If that is right, it does not matter very much what will happen to us.

How is that fellowship to be maintained? How is that relationship to be developed? The Apostle John gives us the answer. First of all there is the word, the command, the exhortation, the objective which we should never lose sight of, and we should always keep in the forefront of our minds.

In verse 1 of I John 2, John says, "these things I write to you, so that you may not sin." If we want to know God and maintain fellowship with Him, develop a right relationship with Him. "Do not sin," is John's simple brief way of saying it. Looking at this simply as practical and direct exhortation, John says simply, "that you may not sin."

To answer this, let me again ask a ridiculously simple question:

What is sin? The most prominent biblical terms for 'sin' in the Old Testament appears in Exodus 34: 7:

Exodus 34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

The term 'iniquity' (or, wickedness) translated from the Hebrew word '*awon*' has its origins in

the idea of bending or twisting.

The term 'transgression' (or, 'rebellion') translated from the Hebrew word '*pesa*' is breaking the law.

The term 'sin' translated from the Hebrew word '*hatta'a*' means missing the mark or straying from the path.

The New Testament Greek word for 'sin' is '*hamartia*' a term that in its etymology is associated with missing the mark in archery.

So we get an idea of how all encompassing these terms for sin are, such as breaking the law, bending or twisting, missing the mark, straying from the path. If part of the definition for sin is bending and twisting then that sure explains what human beings with their nature tend to do with all law is to bend and twist it.

Through common use in speech over time the original metaphoric meanings behind these biblical terms have become somewhat obscure. Today, for the most part, terms like iniquity, wickedness, transgression, and rebellion are synonymous and overlapping terms for sin even in this society. This society has reached a point where they do not even really know what the terms for sin are, because they are so ready to get rid of the term altogether.

We know that God's concise definition for sin is found in I John 3: 4, "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." On the other hand, as the King James Version has it, "Sin is the transgression of the law." Sin is rebelliousness against God's law of love as defined by the Ten Commandments. The world can see only the letter of that law, but we as God's people must also focus on the spirit of that law.

As you know, the Gospel of Mark records Jesus' words regarding defilement: "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness."

The Bible makes it emphatically clear that "all have sinned." Even Christians have time and again experienced the struggle against sin, as we well know. The Apostle Paul describes to the Roman members his experience with sin in his own life. This is a passage we have read quite often, and really we can very easily identify with it.

Romans 7:15-25 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the

inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Paul knew what was right and wanted to do it, but his human nature resisted. He knew what was wrong and he certainly did not want to do it. Nevertheless, it was a real and constant struggle to go against his own human nature, which he refers to here as "the flesh."

After about twenty years of conversion, Paul appreciated his ability to see what was good, but he was frustrated over his inability to do anything about it, especially after two decades of association and membership in God's church. He was still dumbfounded that the tendency to sin was so strong and was still in him. You can just picture him shaking his head as he tried to overcome sin in his own life. No doubt after twenty years most of the sin that he as trying to overcome was the spirit of the law. I am sure that he had the letter of the law pretty well down pat after all of that time.

In verses 17 and 18, we see his agonizing admission that he still had sinful tendencies in his nature. And, in verse 19, he confesses that he still sins.

Paul, as we do today, continued to experience influence from the world that he had been called out of many years earlier. Before Saul was converted Satan had a toehold on him. Paul refers to law eight times in these eleven verses here. So the law was very important to him. He realized this would define sin within him.

In Romans 8: 23, Paul refers to another law, and this law is the law of his human nature, representing his worldly desires that keep him captive to the law of sin. The law of sin is what he had to fight, replacing it with the law of God. The key that Paul gives us here is that the law of God, and the way of God, has to replace the law of sin and the way of Satan. If we try to take a sin out of our lives and do not replace it with God's way of life then another sin will just come right in and fill it.

However, since Paul received the Holy Spirit the law of his mind was his God-given new heart. His new heart was at war with the residue of the world's evil influence. All of us are familiar with this struggle, because it is within us day after day.

The Jews during Paul's time, and under whom Saul received his earlier training, believed that when an evil impulse flared up that human wisdom and reason could overcome it if one was studying the Holy Scriptures. He knew that the law of Moses was a guard against evil, therefore it would produce good impulse or reaction when needed. But this fell short, because something was missing.

Saul was aware of the limited value of this belief, however it was somewhat skewed. He knew that although it was theoretically true, in practice it was not completely true. There are things in human nature which are driven by the seduction of sin. Without a renewing of the mind by the

Holy Spirit it is impossible to completely resist and overcome the seduction of sin. That is what was missing in Saul's mind before his conversion. Although he was more familiar than probably any of us were with the law of God, it was not enough.

It is part of human nature that we know the right way and yet do the wrong, and that we are never as good as we know we should be. There are serious inadequacies in human reasoning that sustain this.

Let me quickly give you three human inadequacies related to knowing the right, yet doing the wrong:

The first human inadequacy is human knowledge. If all we had to do is know that something was wrong, life would be easy. But to know by itself does not make a person good.

This applies to all aspects of life. We may know exactly how we should play a sport like baseball, basketball or soccer, but until we go out and practice what we know, we are a long way from being able to proficiently play it. We may know how we should behave and what etiquette to use in any given situation, but that is a far cry from actually being able to conduct ourselves appropriately.

This emphasizes the difference between righteousness and morality. Morality is knowledge of a code. Righteousness is knowledge with commitment and wisdom to actually think, breathe and live God's way of life. It is only when we know and imitate Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit that we are able to do what we know we should.

The second human inadequacy is human decision making. To decide to do something is far from doing it. All of us suffer from an essential weakness of the will. We come up against problems and difficulties in life, and then, our will to do what is right fails.

We tend to procrastinate about how and when we are going to solve the problem, and then, nothing happens. Procrastinators sabotage themselves. They put obstacles in their own path. They actually choose paths that hurt their resistance to sin.

In "Psychology Today" there was an article by Hara Estroff Marano titled: *Procrastination: Ten Things To Know*.

As an introduction Marano says,

...I talked to two of the world's leading experts on procrastination: Joseph Ferrari, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at De Paul University in Chicago, and Timothy Pychyl, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada.

1. Twenty percent of people identify themselves as chronic procrastinators. For them procrastination is a lifestyle, albeit a maladaptive one. And it cuts across all domains of their life. They don't pay bills on time. They miss opportunities for buying tickets to concerts. They don't cash gift certificates or checks. They file income tax returns late.... [And, I might add: they rarely overcome personal *problems*.]

2. It's not trivial, although as a culture we don't take it seriously as a problem. It represents a profound problem of self-regulation. And there may be more of it in the U.S. than in other countries because we are so nice; we don't call people on their excuses... even when we don't believe them.

3. Procrastination is not a problem of time management or of planning. Procrastinators are not different in their ability to estimate time, although they are more optimistic than others. "Telling someone who procrastinates to buy a weekly planner is like telling someone with chronic depression to just cheer up, insists Dr. Ferrari.

4. Procrastinators are made not born. Procrastination is learned in the family milieu, but not directly. It is one response to an authoritarian parenting style. Having a harsh, controlling father keeps children from developing the ability to regulate themselves, from internalizing their own intentions and then learning to act on them. Procrastination can even be a form of rebellion. What's more, under those household conditions, procrastinators turn more to friends than to parents for support, and their friends may reinforce procrastination because they tend to be tolerant of their excuses.

5. Procrastination predicts higher levels of consumption of alcohol among those people who drink. Procrastinators drink more than they intend to—a manifestation of generalized problems in self-regulation. That is over and above the effect of avoidant coping styles that underlie procrastination and lead to disengagement via substance abuse.

6. Procrastinators tell lies to themselves. Such as, "I'll feel more like doing this tomorrow." Or "I work best under pressure." However, in fact they do not get the urge the next day or work best under pressure. In addition, they protect their sense of self by saying "this isn't important." Another big lie procrastinators indulge is that time pressure makes them more creative. Unfortunately they do not turn out to be more creative; they only feel that way. They squander their resources.

7. Procrastinators actively look for distractions, particularly ones that don't take a lot of commitment on their part. Checking e-mail is almost perfect for this purpose. They distract themselves as a way of regulating their emotions such as fear of failure.

8. There's more than one flavor of procrastination. People procrastinate for different reasons. Dr. Ferrari identifies three basic types of procrastinators:

- arousal types, or thrill-seekers, who wait to the last minute for the euphoric rush.

- avoiders, who may be avoiding fear of failure or even fear of success, but in either case are very concerned with what others think of them; they would rather have others think they lack effort than ability.
- decisional procrastinators, who cannot make a decision. Not making a decision absolves procrastinators of responsibility for the outcome of events.

9. There are big costs to procrastination. Health is one. Just over the course of a single academic term, procrastinating college students had such evidence of compromised immune systems as more colds and flu, more gastrointestinal problems. And they had insomnia. In addition, procrastination has a high cost to others as well as oneself; it shifts the burden of responsibilities onto others, who become resentful. Procrastination destroys teamwork in the workplace and private relationships.

10. Procrastinators can change their behavior

I thought that was good advice.

The third human inadequacy is human diagnosis. The Apostle Paul knew what was wrong; but he could not make it right. We see this manifested when a doctor accurately diagnoses a terminal illness, but he is powerless to prescribe a real cure.

We have our part to play in this crucial struggle against evil. But there is a shortcoming in this responsibility of ours. Human beings do not have the capacity to properly diagnose what is spiritually wrong with us.

Isaiah 55:7-9 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

So it is impossible for a human being with human reasoning and a human mind to be able to understand the spiritual things of God and the spirit of the law.

This is not only a reference to the awesome character of God's will. Verse 7 places an emphasis on the moral difference. Isaiah shows that keeping the spirit of the law was valid in the Old Testament. "Let the wicked forsake his way of life. Let the wicked forsake ... his thoughts."

That gives us an indication and definite understanding that the patriarchs of old understood the spirit of the law.

Remember what Christ said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."

God's will is structured by His righteousness; therefore His will accomplishes a moral purpose—the retrieval of the sinner from the error and evil of his ways.

Human beings do not have anything near this righteous character, which means that we are unable to view ourselves accurately as we truly are. We cannot see ourselves for what we are without God's revealing it to us by the power of His Spirit. It stands to reason, then, that we cannot diagnose our own spiritual problems by ourselves.

Psychiatrists and psychologists today try to do that but they cannot. Freud blamed everything on sex, I believe. I guess that is what he was obsessed with.

Jesus reminds us that, "with men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The only deliverance from this body of death is through Jesus Christ, and the indwelling power of God's Holy Spirit.

I Corinthians 2:9-14 But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

This principle holds true for the human inadequacy of diagnosing our own problems and sins. Spiritual problems are discerned by the Spirit. A man may realize he is doing something wrong by lying, but he sees no need to change it. Even if he sees a need to change it, he does not see the real core of the problem. He may change overt lying but he resorts to 'white lies', as they are called in this society.

So practically speaking, and plainly asked, what is sin?

We know that sin is 'the disobedience of God's supreme holy law' which He has revealed to us. Sin is anything that is condemned in the Bible. It does not matter what it is, if the inspired written word of God tells us not to do it then we must not do it: 'You shall not kill.' 'You shall not steal.' 'You shall not commit adultery.'

Sin is a callous disregard and an active disdain for the righteous values of God. It defies God's standard of righteousness. With this in mind, people in this society have casualness and often a flippant attitude toward doing the right thing. There is hardly a commercial that appears on the screen that does not have some lying somewhere through it. If the people in the commercial are not lying, then the commercial itself is lying in some way.

I mentioned to you about the man that I worked with, Barney. He was about sixty years old and he considered himself a good devout Christian. I believe that he was a Baptist (I am not sure), but he went to church every Sunday and often boasted of being the preacher's fishing buddy.

In one of his more ornery moments he stashed empty beer bottles under the preacher's car seat for the other parishioners to find. He thought it was hilarious.

He was quite a character, very pleasant and happy go lucky but he was dangerous in the area of practical joke. He knew that I did not eat unclean meats or shellfish. So, he came up to me one time with a raw oyster on its open half shell and, purposely in front of me, opened his mouth and let that slimy mucous looking mass slide down his throat. The disgusted look on my face was exactly what he had hoped for. He offered me some. I knew Barney was not easily offended, so I said, "Thanks, but I do not eat those gross things."

"Why not?" he taunted with a smirk. (He already knew the answer.)

"Because God says it is an abomination to eat shellfish," I replied.

In a casual way with squinting eyes and a twisted smile Barney said, "God may say it is an abomination, but He does not say you cannot eat it."

At that point I did not want to answer a fool according to his folly because I knew from experience that Barney was just toying with me. So I dropped it and did not say anything else.

In truth, God does say, 'you shall not eat it.'

Leviticus 11:10-12 But all in the seas or in the rivers that do not have fins and scales, all that move in the water or any living thing which is in the water, they are an abomination to you. They shall be an abomination to you; you shall not eat their flesh, but you shall regard their carcasses as an abomination. Whatever in the water does not have fins or scales—that shall be an abomination to you.

As if we did not hear it the first time, He repeats it again. Whenever God repeats something it is very important, so this is not a thing to just shrug aside. Now that is not only clear, but that is emphatic! God repeated the word abomination four times and added, "you shall not eat." This illustrates the point that even though God emphatically tells us what to do. The enmity against God is ever present in the mind of human beings. That is why although human beings all have a sense of right and wrong, it is the enmity against God that keeps them from attending to it.

Even the secular meaning of the word "abomination" is quite strong. Webster's Dictionary defines it this way:

1. an abominating; great hatred and disgust; loathing. 2. anything hateful and disgusting. Synonyms are: loathing, abhorrence, anathema, evil, hatred, repugnant, disgusting.

So, does the world know what an abomination is? Well, this was their definition. In scripture, the meaning of 'abomination' is equally as strong, but also carries with it a guilt that means eventually having to face the wrath and judgment of God. From the biblical perspective an abomination callously disregards and actively disdains the righteous values God has established.

It disrespects God's holiness, sovereignty as Creator and purposes expressed in the Law. It is ironic that abominable actions are usually not committed in bold and shameless rebellion against God, but the offender perceives according to his own humanly reasoned values that it is the good and right thing to do.

As a result, the sacrifice of the wicked and the prayer of the lawbreaker are abominations. Nevertheless, their practitioners do not perceive themselves as committing an abomination. Often without realizing it, they dismiss God's sovereignty by committing such abominations as idolatry and its related immorality, witchcraft and sorcery.

Failures of God's people to separate from pagan practices that are in conflict with the principles, statutes and laws of God are abominable, as are such practices as narcissism, arrogance, deception, abortion and sexual deviation.

In Ezekiel 7, the land of Israel is personified in Ezekiel's message and he warns that disaster is about to fall. God's judgment was certain because he announced, "the end has come" at least nine times in verses 1-12.

Ezekiel was a faithful watchman, warning the people that the Babylonian army was coming from the north to invade the land, rob it, and ruin it. Babylon was God's instrument of punishment through which He would unleash His anger, judge Israel's abominable behavior, and repay them for their disobedience.

In previous punishments, God had shown pity and spared His people, but this judgment was different. They had defiled His land with their sins, and the only way the land could be cleansed was by punishing the people for their sins.

When Israel neared its judgment, those committing abominations were subject to the wrath and judgment of God.

Ezekiel 7:1-4 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'And you, son of man,' thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel: 'An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end has come upon you, and I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways, and I will repay you for all your abominations. My eye will not spare you, nor will I have pity; but I will repay your ways, And your abominations will be in your midst; Then you shall know that I am the LORD!'

By far the most common use of the term abomination, when referring to spiritual things, and especially to things involving severe judgments and sweeping desolation, is in respect to idolatrous and other polluted corruptions.

It was the pollution of the first temple, or the worship connected with it by such things, in which a whole series of scriptures is described as the abominations that provoked God to lay it in ruins.

Later, in the New Testament, Jesus Christ indicated in Matthew 21: 12-13 that since the same abominable wickedness had once again reared its ugly head and was increasing among the Jews, then the same judgment of evil would again punish them.

God's anger was kindled because of the abominations that defiled His physical temple; therefore, He punished Israel and Judah for it. They were unable to keep even the letter of the law. The spirit of the law was way out of their reach.

The members of God's church are His temple, and this means that our responsibility for fulfilling His standard of righteousness is a much more demanding obligation to know, understand and perform the spirit of the law. The penalty for defiling His temple is no less than destruction.

I Corinthians 3:17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

That just sends shivers through my skin. God destroyed Israel and sent them into captivity because they defiled His physical temple. Then I ask are any of us defiling the spiritual temple, which we are?

In Titus 1: 16 Paul writes, "They profess to know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work." Here, the word 'abominable' means loathsome, detestable, causing horror and disgust by their hypocrisy.

A person becomes abominable when he commits abominations as a way of life. A person with a lifestyle of sin is an abominable person. This reflects the lifestyle of habitual and repeated sins.

Things referred to as an abomination are constantly associated with idolatry and indicates that what is highly esteemed among men constitutes idolatry in a person's mind. Christ said to the Pharisees in Luke 16: 15, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

Any item or idea we hold to be more important than God is an idol. It can be ourselves, our spouse, our house, our car or anything else. It can be a doctrine, philosophy, attitude or way of life. When we realize this, we begin to understand the importance of knowing that obeying the letter of the law just is not enough.

It is not enough to not murder, neither may we hate. It is not enough to not lie; neither may we be insincere or fake. Christians are held to a much higher standard. We are held to the spirit of the law, which can only be understood and accomplished with the spiritual power that comes

from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle John strongly states in Revelation 21: 8 the serious penalty for being abominable.

Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexual immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

That is the final death. All sin is an abomination. There are certain prohibitions which are absolute and about which there is no discussion. If we are continually questioning and breaking those prohibitions, then we will never know the right relationship with God; these are absolute where God is concerned. Sin is disobedience to God's revealed law.

Sin is also 'disobeying conscience.' There is within us all an inward monitor; we have no excuse; before we did that thing we knew it was wrong. In a sense, there was this little voice that told us not to do it, that called us to stop and think. It was there, and we knew it was wrong, and yet we did it. To disobey conscience is to commit sin.

The Bible does not only say that if we are doubtful about a thing we must not do it; it says:

I Thessalonians 5:22 Abstain from every form of evil.

There are many things which, in themselves, may not appear to us to be positively wrong, but which are considered wrong by large and respectable parts of the community; and for us to do them would be regarded as inconsistent and improper with our Christian walk. The issue is one of glorifying God in everything we do. We are ambassadors for Christ and we must uphold the integrity of that office.

Our supreme purpose is that we are here to glorify God by honoring Him and living in accordance with His will. That means we should not be asking ourselves what we want, but what God wants. If we desire to live to His glory, and if we really do that, we will not sin.

Satan broadcasts depressing and discouraging thoughts which make us feel like our sins are unforgivable. But, if we confess our sins to God, I John 1: 9 tells us, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Do not let Satan covertly drive you from optimistic blessing to despair and hopelessness.

Remember, the Apostle John said, "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Who is the 'we' here that has the Advocate? It is not the whole world. John is writing to the members of the Church. The 'we' is us; we who know Him, and we who have the right relationship with the Father.

That is the thing that matters in life, that we know Him in an intimate and spiritual way. We know the Father by coming to know His Son Jesus Christ, the righteous one, the Advocate with

the Father. Christ said, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also."

If Christ is our Advocate, our continued fellowship with God is certain and assured. But for Him to be our Advocate, we must walk as He walked—live as He lived—and come to think as He thought and thinks. What is an advocate? He is a supporter and a sponsor. He is someone who convinces others that we have value and potential.

I John 2:3-6 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

We know that Jesus kept the commandments and taught the spirit of the commandments while on earth, and He continues to keep them and to inspire spiritual understanding to this day. To walk as He walked, means that we must keep ourselves from sin. To think as He thinks means that we have to stop the thought of sin before temptation turns to desire, and desire gives birth to sin.

I John 5:20-21 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

John is just repeating in a more specific way what he said earlier in his letter, 'My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.' Keep yourself from idolatry; keep yourself from sin!

Idolatry is at the core of sin, because it moves God to the periphery of our lives and puts something else in His place. It gives to something else the glory that should be God's alone.

Chameleon-like, it constantly disguises itself so that we are scarcely aware of its presence, even when we are most in the grip of it. Idolatry turns us away from God toward things, and makes the pursuit of things the passion of our lives.

The Apostle Paul admitted that he was seriously troubled by the war between his new mind and the law of sin that waged within him. No doubt the distractions of life were part of that. The society in which he lived had influenced his mind. It was constantly trying to communicate with him. The perspectives and attitudes and viewpoint of Satan's world have been infused into us and are often deeply imbedded in our human nature.

However, we can escape and overcome its influence. Otherwise, God would not have commanded us to overcome it. We must have the faith that God really is with us personally and individually, and that His Word is true and reliable. We also must have the hope that there is great value to be gained by making the right choices. And we must have His love within our

hearts to motivate us to be of benefit to each other in all that we do.

We have much for which to thank God—the greatest of which is for our Advocate Jesus Christ who helps us to maintain the right relationship with God the Father.